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# AT A GIRL'S MERCY.

BY

JEAN KATE LUDLUM,

AUTHOR OF

*"Was He Wise?" "The Minister's Wife," etc.*

THE

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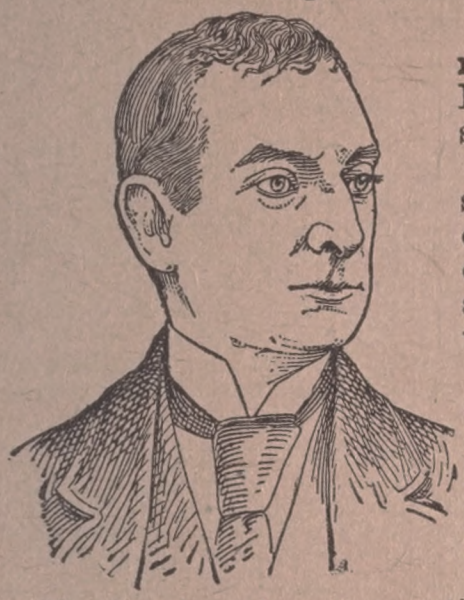

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# AT A GIRL'S MERCY;

OR,

## The Fortunes of War.

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BY

JEAN KATE LUDLUM,

AUTHOR OF

"WAS HE WISE?" "THE MINISTER'S WIFE," etc.

NEW YORK:
STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
31 Rose Street.

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# PREFACE.

Let no one say that this story of the war and its changes and chances is not to the life. There is, through the entire book, the touch of truth more strange often than fiction, and even the entrance of the daring burglars is taken from life. Those who read may learn, if already they do not know, that real life is more startling many times than the highest lights set in a novel; and most novels are taken from life to a greater or less degree. Even the history of the fugitive slaves was taken from the lips of "Lola" herself, and there are other parts as true.

JEAN KATE LUDLUM.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

# CONTENTS.


| CHAPTER. | | PAGE. |
|---|---|---|
| I | A Chance Acquaintance | 7 |
| II | Nan | 18 |
| III | A Development | 33 |
| IV | Two Daughters of the Union | 42 |
| V | A Glimmer of Hope | 52 |
| VI | Waiting for Death | 62 |
| VII | Fugitives | 72 |
| VIII | Waiting With Folded Hands | 83 |
| IX | How He Worked His Plans | 93 |
| X | A Few Changes | 101 |
| XI | A Day and a Night | 110 |
| XII | The Cords of the Net | 117 |
| XIII | That Wound a Heart | 128 |
| XIV | And Then Cut Deeper | 135 |
| XV | Not Reckoning the End | 145 |
| XVI | A Tender Nurse | 157 |
| XVII | A Grateful Patient | 163 |
| XVIII | A Startling Development | 168 |
| XIX | The Coils of the Serpent | 175 |
| XX | The Strangeness of Fate | 185 |
| XXI | The Fortunes of War | 194 |
| XXII | A Daughter of the Union | 205 |
| XXIII | The End and the Beginning | 215 |

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# AT A GIRL'S MERCY.

## CHAPTER I.

### A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE.

The moon had long dipped below the horizon, and the world was hushed in the silence that comes only with the dawn, or with death. When the east should glimmer with the new-born morning, the birds would awake, and all nature would arouse; but at present not a thing was stirring, not an insect nor a bird. Under the elms that surrounded the hall where Squire Courtland lived the darkness was more dense and deep, if that were possible, and only a faint trace of paler shadow marked the edge of the lawn where the thick hedge shut off the street.

A deadly stillness, not a glimmer of light in the house, not a glimmer of light in the east, where the dawn was being born; not even a dog in the kennels lifted his voice to warn the inmates of the house of the danger that lurked unseen, unknown in the stillness and deep shadow of the elms.

Silence—and was the silence of death to follow?

A whisper, scarcely audible in the silence, a light, firm step, making no sound on the close-cropped

grass of the lawn, then a faint, quickly extinguished gleam of light from a bull's-eye lantern, and the peace of the night was broken, and the touch of evil had marred the breathless waiting of nature for the dawn.

"Is it all right, pard?" whispered a voice that, in the stillness, sounded almost startling.

"Right," was the concise reply, as another form and another step blended with the elm shadows. "Everything's quiet as the grave, but you may as well keep a still tongue in your head. Where are the others?"

Instantly a half dozen voices replied in a whisper that was like the stirring of leaves in a low wind; a half dozen other forms arose from the roots of the hedge, it might be, like spirits of the night; but again silence fell upon them. They were in the presence of their chief; their safety lay in obeying unquestionably.

"All's ready," was the command, in a voice that sounded distinctly to each and all, yet which would not have been heard at the distance of two yards. "Everything in readiness; all of them asleep as sound as the dead; we have only to enter, and, mind you, a man goes back on his courage under pain of death! Follow me, and follow my example."

They moved under the trees as though they were part of the trees themselves; not a sound was heard save now and then a faint fall of footsteps as they trod the walks of the lawn; every hand was on the butt of a revolver, and every man was ready to sell his life dearly, if need be. They filed, one by one, up to the house, up the steps, and on to the piazza leading to the two long windows of the library.

Not a word was spoken; all knew what was ex-

pected; all went to work as one man, silently, swiftly, surely; and ere the first streak of new-coming day had touched the east they were inside the house, the fastenings of the windows falling off like so much straw under their experienced hands and tools.

Outside, the darkness had been dense enough, but in there, it was like the void before the world was made—no form, no shadow; nothing but a solid body of blackness that might hold danger or death for the men; but not one of them flinched, not one of them failed in the work laid out for him. Like so many shadows of a formless shadow, they moved across the room, feeling their way as though on familiar ground, yet to guard against any possible obstruction that might lay in the way.

Half way across the room the leader stopped, and every man of them stopped also. But there was no danger; all was silent as the grave, silent as death, betraying nothing that lay beyond.

A scratch of a match, like the report of a pistol in the silence, as the chief applied the match to the gas above his head, making the men visible to each other, a motley group, with masked faces, and ugly-looking weapons in their hands—hands that were quick to revenge an injury or a fancied slight.

"This is your field," the chief said, with a low laugh of utter nonchalance, as he pointed to a heavy safe at the far end of the room. "The squire put his boodle there when he came from town yesterday. Afraid that the government would seize it for use in the war, but never expecting that another government would make good his hold upon it. Well, you know the lay of the land as well as I. Make no

blunders. Your field is here. I shall take the rest of the house with the aid of Dan. Come on, Dan."

A slim young fellow stepped out from among the others, obedient as a dog, and the two passed out of the library into the hall. As they started up the stairs the chief paused long enough to light the gas there, saying, with a laugh, noiseless as his step:

"Plenty of light, Dan, always plenty of light. There's more to be seen in the light."

It was marvelous how silent the house was, save for the stealthy footsteps on the stairs as the two men passed up into the house. How could they sleep so soundly when their lives and their home were in danger? Without interruption the men passed from one room to another, doing their work quickly and well. Without a word the squire was overpowered almost before he was awake, and his arms tied down, while a gag was placed in his mouth; and the same treatment was given his wife. Neither dared make resistance for fear of endangering the life of the other, for the revolvers were in close proximity, and the eyes of the men, under their masks, showed that they would not hesitate to use them if necessary.

Then through the rooms they went, one room after the other, lighting the gas in each, until the house was ablaze with light, yet hidden from outside view by the heavy, closed shutters. One room after the other, making sure of no interference from unknown sources, securely fastening the door leading into the servants' hall, for no blood was to be unnecessarily shed, and there were many servants who would willingly sacrifice their lives for the sake of the master and his house, and discovery by them would mean an infuriated defense against these

midnight visitors, uninvited, unexpected and unwelcome.

At last, pausing at the end of the hall near a door leading into the tower room, the leader turned to his companion with a gesture of dismissal.

"Take what you find," was his low command; "carry it below, and wait till I come." His hand was on the butt of his revolver, and the gleaming eyes under the mask rested for a moment on the other's with a meaning not to be misunderstood; then the other went his way, well knowing that treachery meant death, and the leader, turning the knob of the door, entered the room.

Striking a match as noiselessly as possible, he lit the gas, and turning it on in a brilliant glow that flooded the pretty, airy room—evidently a woman's room—he turned toward the bed, standing for a moment so that the light would not touch the face of the sleeper and arouse her too suddenly.

Up to this everything had passed off smoothly, better even than he had dared hope, and he did not propose spoiling the game just here. A strange smile stirred the drooping mustache just visible under the mask as he wondered—watching the quiet face among the pillows, one jeweled hand thrown in a childish fashion above the bonnie head of curls—what the girl would say when he chose to awaken her and make known his errand, an errand he rather dreaded making known with this pure face before him. And then, even as one will at the moment of great events, he began to picture what the lips would say—warm, red lips they were, just parted over the small white teeth—and whether or not the eyes would flash or shrink, and of what color they should be to match the softly colored face and warm yellow

hair; and then—the white lids lifted of themselves, and the eyes opened large and deeply blue—the blue that turns to purple with excitement, the blue that is true and sweet with life.

The man who had unconsciously drawn nearer the bed, attracted by the purity of the girl's face, now drew himself to his full height, and touched the revolver he held in his hand with a sharp metallic click that drove the color from the sweet face among the pillows, but did not daunt the brave eyes lifted quietly and rather defiantly to his. The brilliant eyes behind the mask glowed with an intenser light as the man's voice broke the silence.

"Pardon this intrusion, friend. You doubtless desire an explanation, and shall have it at once. Everyone in this house, excepting yourself and my comrades, is in my power at this moment. We came here on a little matter of business, and decided not to call in the aid of the officers of the law in capturing the house. Our business is almost finished, and my friends are waiting below. I intend to use no violence with you unless you make it necessary for me to do so. My private secretary here," with a slight movement of his hand that brought the revolver flashing under the gaslight, "wishes—nay, demands, if need be," as an ominous flash in the blue eyes opposite showed an undaunted spirit. "That, however, I trust will not be necessary," and again there was a twitching of the partly hidden mustache and a gleam in the dark eyes between the slits of the mask. "You will oblige me, madam, by arising and showing me where your money is, and such jewelry as I may desire."

The girl's spirit arose to the occasion.

"Is it not rather ungallant," she asked, her low

voice stirred by a clear note of indignation, while her eyes met unflinchingly the eyes behind the mask, searching for any clew that might possibly lead to the identification of the audacious thief—"is it not rather ungallant, sir, to ask a lady to arise? May I not remain where I am, and so direct you to my safe and my jewels? It is to be regretted that my brothers are not here to perform this little courtesy in my stead, but my brothers are away to the war, and my father, I understand, is in your power."

She laughed as she spoke—a disdainful laugh that set the man's eyes afire—and ran her fingers carelessly through the short curls of her head. She would meet this man on his own ground of mocking courtesy, and if a chance should offer——

"I would I could oblige you, sir, but it is not a pleasant duty."

"I would it were in my power to grant your request, sweet friend," he said, bending before her in low courtesy, "but it is impossible. Your eyes proclaim your forced friendship for me, and I prefer having you before my eyes—a pretty vision, in sooth!" he added, smiling. "May I trouble you to arise at once, as time passes, and I cannot linger, however much I may desire to do so."

Again she laughed her sweet, disdainful laugh, that made the man's ears tingle, as she slipped slowly from the bed, and arose, confronting him, drawing herself to her full height with pretty dignity, that even then left her a head and shoulders below his stature—for he had a magnificent figure, be he what he might—her white gown falling around her, hiding even the dainty white feet beneath.

"Sir," she said, with a deprecating gesture, not a trace of fear in her manner, not a quiver in the

brave face and frank eyes lifted to his, though she knew full well she was at his mercy. "Sir, it is but a poor offering I can make you. Some paltry dollars, perhaps, and a few jewels that are worth more to me as gifts than they could be to you, because the most and best of my jewels, thank Heaven, I sent to the city yesterday to the safety vaults. But such as I have here I give to you. Take them, take them freely. I would not have you stain your manhood with the guilt of robbing a defenseless girl."

It was a daring speech, and she knew it, but she must find some vent for her bitter scorn of the man. He felt the hot blood rush to his cheeks, and his eyes were blazing with wrath and unconquerable admiration for the girl, who, at his mercy, dared show her spirit in such words as these, words that he wondered afterward he did not strike her down for uttering. He touched the revolver impressively, and his lips grew white as the blood surged from his face around his heart.

"My fair maiden is bold," he said, "and gracious," a metallic ring in his voice. "But I must hasten her movements, or dawn will find me still here."

She shrugged her round shoulders contemptuously as she crossed the room to her dressing-case.

"Evil lurks in darkness; the wicked fear the light," she said, lightly. "Only the wicked, sir."

He made a swift movement, as though he would grasp her arm—the round white arm, from which the loose lace sleeve fell back as she reached for the key of her jewel-case that hung on a bracket near—his teeth ground together in sudden fury. But he did not touch her. He stood for a moment as though

turned to stone, then he uttered a careless laugh, with an answering shrug of his shoulders.

"By the Lord Harry, but you are daring," he said. "Let me advise you, sweet maid, from the height of my superior knowledge, to keep a tighter rein on your speech. The lips are too pretty to utter such words as these."

She flashed her great eyes upon him, afire with indignation and scorn, in spite of the ripple of laughter on her lips.

"The height of your knowledge, sir? You should have said the depth; there is only purer knowledge on the heights, and my lips are my own, to speak or be silent," she said, as the key clicked in the lock and she opened her jewel-case. "These are poor gifts, my lord, to one who takes what he will. It is too bad for your purpose that I have not my best ones here, but I think I sent them away because I knew or felt there was villainy on foot."

He uttered a smothered curse as he closed the lid over the jewels.

"I will take it as it is," he said, resuming the novel fire of raillery; "a gift freely given is higher than all. Is there anything else of value of which you would dispose? Your watch, for instance, or that locket on your neck that shows through the lace of your robe?"

A flush crept to the soft cheeks, but she lifted the dainty watch from its case, that she had hoped was hidden from him by the huge toilet bottle in front of it, but when he held out his hand for the locket her eyes blazed as darkly as his.

"No," she cried, sharply, for the first and only time losing command of the half scornful, half laughing tone she had held toward him. "No, you

cannot have this. It is a gift that even you must respect. It is mine, and shall still be mine. Have you not all else?"

For a moment he was tempted to take it from her whether she would or no, just to prove to her that after all she was a frail girl in his power, but he let it pass, and merely laughed lightly as he said:

"Keep the pretty bauble, if you will, my maid. Your anger becomes you. But I will humor you in this. Is there aught else you have I may desire?"

"I wish," she said, and half laughed as she said it, for she knew how conscienceless such men as this one were—"I wish I had something worth hastening your departure, sir. I would gladly give it to you if only I possessed it."

"By Heaven!" he burst out then. "If you were a man——"

"Which I'm not, you see," she broke in, her voice steady and sweet. "Come, come, sir. This, to a woman? You should have entered the army, and fought with men who would soon teach you manners. Ah, sir, I fear your courage is lacking, that you stay at home and fight with women."

"The better half of the world, and therefore the better fight," he said, recovering his coolness, and falling back into the groove of their conversation. "But I must hasten. Your purse, madam. Thanks. And I will take that ring you have on your finger. Judging at random, I should say it is worth more than all these jewels. It is quite too heavy for such slender fingers as yours."

"I give it with pleasure, my lord. Would that it were a bullet," and she laid the ring in his hand with a mocking grace.

"Doubtless its aim would be sure," he said, "and

sharp as your words are, sweet friend. And now, perforce, I must leave you, as the hours are lengthening. This one request I make"— she was unconsciously stroking the delicate sprays of Canterbury bells in a gray pitcher near her hand—"and see you obey to the letter, else," and he tapped lightly but significantly the gleaming revolver. "You are to give me your word that you will not attempt to leave this room to release your parents, or give the alarm in any way, until the sun has risen clear of the hills yonder. I warn you for your own good. You are brave, but we would know of it should you break your promise, and it will be at peril of your life to do so. Pardon my stringent measures, and grant me a simple request that does not at all affect your safety."

He laughed and bent before her in deep courtesy, saying, with great humility:

"May I take with me a spray of these flowers, madam—these blue bells that are the hue of your eyes and the color to be worn for success? I would take with me some souvenir of this meeting!"

He disengaged the most perfect of the sprays, and a strange smile stirred his drooping mustache as he turned to leave her presence.

She bent in mocking courtesy in reply to his, a brilliant smile on her face.

"Sir, I bid thee farewell. Every request of thine shall be complied with, not because it is a wish of mine, but because it is thy will. Indeed," she added, and the smile deepened until for the moment the man was dazzled, "I would grant you much more than that, sir, to be rid of you."

But when the door closed behind him the sweet color died from her face, and the light from her eyes,

as, reeling for a moment where she stood, she suddenly fell insensible to the floor.

---

## CHAPTER II.

### NAN.

How long she was unconscious she never knew, but presently she opened her eyes and sat up, running her fingers through her hair in bewilderment. Nothing was clear to her at first, but by and by, though her head was throbbing furiously, and the room reeling and swimming before her eyes, all that had passed came back with renewed vividness, and then the horror of the thought seemed to turn her brain, and she began to sink with the lights reeling around her—down and down into a horrible gulf of blackness. All power of thought or action seemed to have left her; she was reeling and swaying with terrible velocity through a darkness that had no light, a darkness so dense and terrible she wondered if it were to last forever, yet wondered in such a vague, apathetic fashion that she smiled dully, thinking she was dead.

Then the darkness parted, the formless mass of shadows surrounding her began to flash and vibrate with lightning gleams, and a dead sort of thunder, a deadly sickness, possessed her, a desire to go back to the utter blackness, with its dulled sense, rather than fight with the new agonizing struggle for life. Then the reeling lights and flashes resolved themselves into the brilliant glare of the gas jet over her dressing-case, and with a deep sigh of utter weariness she again sat up, brushing the curls from her death-white face.

She remembered all now—the fear and excitement, with the stern determination over all in her mind to be brave, as her brothers were brave, fighting on the battle-field at that moment, it might be—fighting or—dead. She, the sister of soldiers, must be brave as a soldier in her little way. To submit with such apparent carelessness to the outrage on her parents and her home, had been very bitter to her, yet even at the time she remembered—and it came to her keenly in the midst of the danger—that in battle much more may be accomplished at times by strategy than by open action.

"And I shall capture him," she thought, with a trembling smile, as she arose wearily to her feet, steadying herself by a chair. "I shall capture him yet. At least I have his voice and figure, and that quick motion of his hands that somehow impresses itself upon one, and I will know him by them if ever I meet him. And at this minute there are papa and mamma bound, he said, and helpless, and I helpless to help them because of my word passed that I will not leave my room until the sun is rising."

She crossed the room slowly, as though she had suddenly grown old, and turned down the gas to a faint glimmer; then she went to the eastern window, and, drawing aside the curtains, turned the slats of the blinds so that she could look out.

Between the leaves of the rose vine climbing her window, on the hill beyond, the east was faintly flushing with the touch of dawn. A gleam as of silver stretched along the horizon, as though the edge of a sword rested on the curve of the hill; above this wavered a line of pink, deepening to crimson, and fading off to streaks of pale gold and steely blue.

The girl watched it with breathless interest, hold-

ing fast by the window-ledge to steady herself, her soul fairly quivering into a prayer that the day would come quickly.

There was evidently no one stirring but herself; the house was still as death, ay, worse than death, for how could she wait till the sun should mount the hill yonder before she could help her parents—before she could know the worst? The house was so still. Could the man have lied to her—lied to her, that no one had been harmed, when her father and mother at that moment might be——

She dared think no more; thought without action was unbearable. With a swift movement she swept the curtains aside, and leaning out, noiselessly opened wide the shutters, then turning, she set the gas at full blaze, sending a weird gleam of light out to meet the warm, sweet light of morning.

"I cannot bear it!" she whispered, excitedly, to herself, pacing the floor with clenched hands and quivering face, her step grown strong with excitement. "I cannot bear it any longer. I promised not to leave my room till the sun is risen, but some one may see this light and come to learn the cause. I pray God they may. It is unbearable—unbearable. They may be—— What may not have happened in the time I have spent here waiting."

She stamped her bare foot noiselessly, but in a tempest of anger and fear; she threw out her hands with a gesture of despair, the blue eyes purple with excitement as she turned toward the window, her face drawn with waiting.

"Will the dawn never come—will no one ever come? How can everyone sleep so sound with this at their doors? How can they fail to see my light? Oh, if I only might have shot him down like a dog! If I

might have treated him as he deserved! If only Charlie and Frank were here to help me in this! And I shut in here as though I were a coward!"

Hastily dressing herself she again turned to the window, waiting for the dawn and the rising of the sun.

By and by a streak of light shot up the east—another and another; an arch of glittering rays, a solid rim of blinding gold, growing larger and larger, into the half—the whole of a golden globe—and the sun was risen.

The girl stood like a statue, and watched it rise up and up, her breath quick and labored, as though she were suffocating; she put her two hands up to her head to still its beating; her eyes were strained to meet the rising sun.

"I shall know, I shall know!" she cried, softly, the return of all her strength bringing a flush to her cheeks and a new light to her eyes.

She was ready for what should come, and under a wonderful self-control, as she stood, her hand on the handle of the door, watching the sun mount the opposite hill. When it was clear of the slope, sailing like a golden ball over the trees and the gardens on the hill-top, she flung the door wide open and ran along the hall, holding her breath with the thought of what might be waiting her, a sob in her throat, a cry in her heart for help to bear what was to come.

The door was ajar, and with blanching face she pushed on into the room beyond. For a moment her heart stood still as she saw only two silent figures on the bed, but she regained her courage when a movement proved that her fears were groundless. Both were gagged, as the thief had said, and it was with trembling hands that the girl untied the knots

in the cords that bound them so securely and held the gag so firmly in place that not a sound could pass their lips.

Excepting rather severe stiffness from the uncomfortable position and strain, the squire was all right after a few minutes, though almost speechless with indignation and apprehension as to the extent of their loss; but Mrs. Courtland did not recover so easily. The shock, together with the anxiety as to their daughter's fate, threw her into a fever, and she lay tossing in delirium among the pillows, knowing no one, babbling incoherently, her thin face sunken more than even the worry about her boys had been able to do, her eyes bloodshot and partly open, giving a ghastly look to the sweet old face.

"Oh, this is worse than all the rest," the girl said, her own face pallid from watching the flush and flickering of the faint life before her. "Oh, this is the worst, papa—so much the worst. Oh, mamma, oh, mamma, why is it you who must bear the worst of everything?"

"You must come away, dear," her father said, quietly placing his arm around her, and gently leading her away from the bedside. "The physician will be here presently, and if Sarah should awaken your face would but startle her. You have been through a trying ordeal, Nan, but you must not lose your self control now."

When the most of the excitement was over, the girl and her father sat alone in the library, the girl softly smoothing the gray hair from the squire's temple—grown, oh, so much whiter, it seemed to her, in that terrible night.

"If they had only spared his," he said, despair-

ingly. "If they had only spared his, Nan. It is bad enough, as it would be if they had taken only that which I had up to send on to help the army, but that they took his, too——"

"Whose, papa?" her hand very tender and soothing on his head.

"Howard Blake's, child. I drew it from the National last night for him, and should have taken it to him at once had he been home; but he was not, and now those rascals have it. It is terrible to think how helpless I was, Nan."

"Yes, papa dear; but it wasn't your fault. You drew it according to Mr. Blake's order; he took the risk when he asked you to draw it. He knew he would be absent from home, and you must keep it over night. Why should you feel it so dreadfully, papa? You can pay it back, you know, if he desires it," the girl said, it seeming very simple to her, knowing so little as she did about money, save to spend it. "You can make it good, papa, and it isn't half so bad as though you had stolen it."

She laughed to make him laugh, for he seemed so deeply buried in despair that her heart ached for him, seeing him as she had hitherto seen him, grave almost to a fault, showing no emotion even when his sons, the pride of his heart, had donned the blue and marched away it might be never to return. And to see him so crushed by the loss that, to the girl, was only cause for indignation and recovery of the stolen articles if possible, together with a severe punishment for the thieves who were so audacious, was terrible to her. She knew so little about her father's affairs, or the state of the government treasury, and the need there was for all the money it was possible to secure, and the generosity of so many

men to give almost their all to aid on the cause of freedom and victory.

"Don't you worry, you dear papa. You can easily pay it back, you know, if that is necessary, though I can't for the life of me see how he could ask it. And as to that, if you need the money yourself, now there are my jewels—more, really, than I know what to do with—and I will gladly——"

His stern face, broken into quivering that was instantly stilled, stopped further words, and she only stood smoothing his hair with her tender fingers, wishing from the bottom of her heart that she were a man to take this burden from her father's shoulders.

"Nan," he said, lifting a trembling hand, and taking one of hers within it, patting it as he had done when she was a child, and came to him for comfort—it had been her habit to go to her father for comfort. "My brave little Nan! I haven't come to that yet, please God, but it is like your thoughtfulness to wish to help where help might be needed. It is only the awkwardness of its coming just now, when our army needs all the help we can give. That of Mr. Blake, with what I have lost of my own, will cripple my business considerably. The total loss is somewhere in the neighborhood of seventy-five thousand dollars, and that isn't a light loss at this time. It is the cramping of help where I wish to help that worries me. Our soldiers are suffering now for necessaries that this money—ay, half of this money—would give if only for a day, and at this crisis a day may mean victory. To take the food from the mouths of our soldiers—cowardly thieves as they are. If I had them here I would shoot them down as I would so many rabid curs. The city is swarming

with such, who will have to learn their places and their rights at the point of the bayonet or from the leaden bullet of our arms."

"Is it so bad as that, papa?"

"So bad, and even worse," replied the squire, with deepening lines on his face. "So bad, little girl, that one's life isn't safe in the city for a day."

"Oh," the girl said, "papa, if I were a man to enter the army and help toward bringing the peace! They told us we should have peace at the end of a few months at the most, and here the war has been going on for months already, and we seem no nearer the end than at the beginning."

"We must fight it out, little girl," the squire said, with a sad smile, the first on his face that day. "And if I were not crippled with this rheumatic leg of mine, it wouldn't take me long to enter the lists with the youngest of them. And not only that, but here I am crippled to a certain extent by this robbery, that not only deprives me of the amount I intended forwarding to the government, but also takes fifty-thousand dollars of what does not belong to me, but which I shall have to make good."

"But don't you think, papa," Nan said, a flash in her eyes, "that Mr. Blake will require no return of this money? How could he ask it, when he ran the risk on giving you the order to draw for him? And if he has a spark of patriotism—which, I believe, I doubt—he must let this go when he knows how it will cripple you for aid to the army. Isn't there something I can do—write a note to him and ask him to call upon you that you may talk it over with him? Are you sure everything is done, papa, that can be done? Are those detectives trustworthy? So many of them will do nothing but make a pretense

to search for the thieves unless they are paid well for their trouble."

"Yes, dear, everything is done that can be done. The detectives are the best in the city, and they do it without hope of reward—don't think so ill of our city officials, Nan—though I shall reward them well if they succeed, which I have almost no hope of their doing. The men were so audacious—so daring and dare-devil. They were pretty sure of not being detected when they made such a raid on the house. Look at the way in which they worked. The house a blaze of light. And they worked as only professionals would know how to work. Even the chief, who came first this morning, said he thinks it will be a tough chase, but they will, of course, do what they can. I have little hope of success on our side, Nan. I have sent for Mr. Blake, and will see what he has to say, though it will be but right to pay what was stolen of his while in my house, if he desires it. There, little girl, run away. You have had enough worry and excitement for one morning to make an ordinary young woman ill for a month. A breath of this fresh air will do you good, and I must go up to your mother. They cannot keep me from the room."

"Of course not, papa; let us hope that Mr. Blake will see this matter as we see it. If he does not, I shall despise him more than usual." And she looked capable of it as she turned away, just as Mr. Blake himself was announced.

With a tender pressure of the fingers over hers, Nan passed from the room, giving the new-comer a cool bow, to which he responded by one as calm, though there was a gleam in his eyes that showed a stronger sense of what he considered was his right.

"If he isn't good to papa he can really have no heart," Miss Nan said to herself as she went out into the cool, old-fashioned garden in which she took so much pride. "I don't believe he does possess much of that commodity, anyway," she added. "He would consider it altogether too unprofitable, for his coin is dollars and cents with a better sense left out." And she shrugged her shoulders daintily as she stooped over the huge bed of white carnations. Carnations were Charlie's favorites. "If only the boys were here," a smile chasing the sigh from her lips almost before it was born, "and yet I would not have them other than where they are when all of our boys are needed. How a man like Howard Blake, with his strength and health, can willingly remain at home when even father, old as he is and lame, would go in a moment if they would take him. Well, I won't bother about you, Howard Blake, for you aren't worthy when there is so much else to think of, with mamma sick and papa so down-hearted with this loss, and the boys—who knows where the boys are at this moment! Mamma shall have her flowers when she awakes, anyway, and I will do what I can to help papa in this trouble. It isn't much, of course, that I can do, knowing so little about his affairs, but I can learn if I will, and it will help him just to talk of it to some one."

And then, clipping the sweet carnations with her tender fingers, every blossom bringing thoughts of the boys and wonder as to what they were doing and where they might be while she, their sister, was gathering flowers safe at home, her heart with them, though her eyes could see them not. And the flowers never told of the tears that fell among them as she buried her face in them for a moment,

her ears ringing with the laughter and noise of her brothers through the house—the dear laughter and noise that might never again awaken the old hall so empty and lonely now. And she shyly pressed her lips to one of the blossoms that swung against her face as though in caress, as she passed slowly down the walk to the summer-house at the lower end of the garden, half buried among ivy and trumpet vines, with a wide border of tall swaying Canterbury bells around it, their blue blossoms lifted in the sweet wind stealing down the garden, fragrant with its scents, swaying and swinging as though tolling a noiseless requiem for the boys wearing their colors on the battle-field, who might never come back to those waiting with nothing to do but pray and hope that the war would bring them less of loss than their hearts feared.

These blue bells swaying on their slender stalks had been the girl's favorites. As a child she had never tired of hearing stories of the wonderful chimes they rang for the fairies of the garden, or how a bit of the sky had slipped down one night and changed to the delicate blossoms at the desire of a princess of fairyland. And they had grown with her; the garden in summer had never been without the sprays with their dots of blue. But now, as she bent above them, a thought that hurt her came in her mind, and she must not care for them. Had not the man who robbed them of not only their possessions but their peace of mind, and whose villainy had placed her mother on a bed from which she might never again arise—had not this man chosen these flowers, and therefore made them hateful to her forever? For of course she could care for them no more, hating him so, hating so his admiration of

her flowers. She could never care for them again, and yet how could she see them every day, and know what they had been to her, without caring?

But, after all, why should she blame the flowers for his crime? Were they not still the blue bells swinging in the same old garden? Still sweet, and dainty, and fair? She laughed at her own absurdity, and stooping tenderly over the flowers, cut the longest sprig, and placed it among the carnations, red and white, in her hand.

"They are Frank's flowers as well as mine, and the color of his eyes, too, and why shouldn't I love them?"

She was standing in the shadow of the vines, holding the flowers at a little distance from her, the better to note the effects of cream white and warm red and blue, when a step crunching the gravel of the walk beside her startled her from her pretty attitude.

"Charming, Miss Nan, very charming, indeed," said Mr. Blake, pausing beside her with an air of familiarity that made the girl flush and dart one of her level glances up at him, full of a fire, that would have warned any other man to keep his distance from the sharp tongue that was ready to defend her rights. "Very charming and suitable for you. The red and the white and blue are your colors with your brothers in the war. But what a terrible misfortune this is that has befallen you."

"Not so terrible as it might be," she said, icily. "And, after all, there is more than one sort of misfortune, Mr. Blake. Do you know, I was almost happy a moment ago."

"And you are not now," he said, an unpleasant expression on his face, an unpleasant laugh crossing

his lips—a laugh that merely drew the thin lips across his white teeth in a disagreeable manner. "Which, I suppose, I am to understand is because of my presence, Miss Nan."

"Well," she said, crisply, "every one has his own supposition, but, after all, we can endure almost anything upon necessity."

Then a thought of her father, and this man's hold upon him, softened her manner, and she looked up with one of her sunniest smiles. For her father's sake she could put personal likes and dislikes aside, and be pleasant to this man—she should not let self rule her words and manners so much as she had.

So she smiled and turned her sunny face toward him in the shadow of the vines, and lifted her frank eyes to his unclouded by her thoughts. But down in his heart that smile registered a vow that she should feel his power to the utmost.

"I must compliment my fair neighbor for her pluck," he said, his thoughts showing no more on the surface than did hers. "It was a brave thing, Miss Nan. A good many would have lost their heads or been cowards enough to plead for themselves—"

"Would you?" she interrupted, the old spirit getting the better of her resolutions.

Then she bit her lip with vexation, and laughed lightly.

"How ridiculous, Mr. Blake. Of course you wouldn't. Like all men, you would have had an insane desire to oust him, and been ousted yourself for your pains in a way you wouldn't like. Or you would have tried to break his head, and had your own broken instead. Oh, I know you men. But, you see, I was wiser."

"A woman's tact," he said, his lips drawn over

his teeth again. "The man must indeed be a brute who would harm you, Miss Nan."

"Pshaw!" she said, disrespectfully. "Don't be more ridiculous than you can help—from politeness," once more recovering herself just in time to save an awkward speech. "He would have shot me as coolly as he would have shot you, if I had made an attempt to escape or betray him; and what would have been the use? It is very hard on my father just now. And mother, too. Mother is very sick, Mr. Blake, from the excitement."

"Yes," he said, "I know, Miss Nan. You have my sincere sympathy. But in regard to your father, I think we can compromise matters in a manner satisfactory to all. That would be only neighborly, you know."

"Of course it's only neighborly," she said, with quick defending of her father. "And I can't for the life of me see how father is to blame. You took the chances, you now, when you wished him to draw the money for you, knowing that it would have to remain here over night. Every one is liable to robbery. We couldn't help that the thieves took yours along with ours. How could they know that part was yours, and if they had they would have had no objection to it."

The sinister smile crossed his lips as he replied, with apparent regret:

"What you say is all very well and very appropriate for his daughter to say, Miss Nan; but you do not understand business enough to comprehend the matter. Your father and I understand it pretty well."

"Oh, doubtless!" she said, bitterly. "But I hope you will be just to him, Mr. Blake!"

Again the consciousness of failure in a politic

dealing with this man flushed her cheeks, but she came to her own colors valiantly.

"You will do the very best you can, Mr. Blake? Papa is an old man, and he feels it very much that he loses this money, which he intended for the use of the army. You know how he feels about it, and you will do your best?"

"Canterbury bells," he said, lightly, leaning toward her to touch the string of bells in her hand. "They were my mother's flowers, Miss Nan. One seldom sees them nowadays. Would it be asking too much——"

"Oh, dear, no!" she said, rather ungraciously. She gave them to the thief with more willingness than to this man, who was her equal so far as the world went. "Oh, dear, no, Mr. Blake. Take them, of course. Here!" she disengaged the spray of bells from the bouquet, and handed it to him, saying, lightly: "They are such old-fashioned flowers I wonder at your taste, Mr. Blake. There's nothing particularly striking about them, though they look well in a bouquet."

"Thank you, Miss Nan," he said, with calm indifference of her scorn. "For your sake I will do the best I can in this matter with your father."

"He talks for all the world as though father were a criminal!" she cried, indignantly, as she looked resentfully after him as he walked down the garden with a quiet air of authority that aroused all her antagonism. "And I have a good mind," she added, savagely, "to dig out these flowers root and branch. What a depraved taste I must have when thieves, and others as bad, choose them.

"For my sake, indeed!" she added presently, as the memory of his words came back to her. "It'll

be for no such cause you are good to father, Mr. Blake, if I know it."

And there were no Canterbury bells in her bouquet as she entered the house a few minutes later.

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## CHAPTER III.

### A DEVELOPMENT.

As Nan entered the hall with the flowers in a bowl ready for her mother's room, her father called to her from the library, and she went to him gladly, knowing from his voice that he had good news for her. He was pacing the room restlessly, though with evident pain from his rheumatic leg, his hands clasped behind his back, his face a trifle less careworn than it was an hour before. As she entered, he turned toward her with a smile pathetic from its attempt at cheerfulness.

"Well, Nan, little girl, I have bearded our lion, and he isn't so bad as we thought."

"I am so glad, papa."

"So am I, Nan—more glad than you can guess, for, not having to make this good at once, I can forward at least a few thousands for the use of the army next week instead of next month—or, perhaps it could not have been for two or three months otherwise. He says he will wait the result of the search for the thieves, and if the money is not recovered, we can then settle the difficulty in some other manner. At any rate, it will be of great advantage to me, postponing settlement in this way."

"I am very glad, papa," Nan said, adding, stoutly, however: "But I can't conceive how he could do otherwise. Any one with an ordinary sense

of justice would do the same. But, then, papa, perhaps we should give him special credit, it is so against his nature."

"Well, well," the squire said, "Nan, we may be hard on Blake after all. We will accept his arrangements, anyway, and leave him to prove his nature for himself. I will go up to your mother now, and then I must off to the city. It will be a hard day, Nan." He sighed involuntarily as he turned to leave the room. At the doorway he turned to her again. "Keep watch over mother, Nan, and don't allow any excitement near her. If neighbors come in, as undoubtedly they will, to hear the details, keep them quiet as possible. These are the doctor's orders; and if any—change—comes——"

She looked up hastily, frightened at the change in his voice, and crossed quickly to his side; but the stern face was set, and she could make nothing from it.

"What do you mean, papa?"

"I should not have frightened you, child," he said, gravely, his hand unconsciously touching the fair head that just reached to his shoulder; "but you are a woman now, Nan, and the only one to be depended upon in this time. A change in your mother's condition may come at any moment, for the better or the worst. It would be cruel to keep you out of the knowledge and have it come like a blow, as it will be in any event if it comes, as it may. The nurse is capable of attending to her duties, but there must be some one to attend to the household, dear, and you are the only one to do it. Keep the house as quiet as you can, and let me know at once if I am needed——"

He did not finish the sentence, but Nan under-

stood, her heart for a moment stopping its beating with dread, but her face catching something of her father's stern self-repression, stifling down the inward cry against this last terrible trouble that was hanging over them.

"I understand, father," she said, and though her lips were white her voice was steady. It was the first time she had called him "father," and his heart ached for her sudden awakening to womanhood and the sadness of life.

"Good-morning, Nan," he said. "Keep up a brave heart, and things may not be so bad as we fear. I will be home early as possible to-night. You will not be bothered by any of this business so far as the detectives are concerned, for they will go to my office for whatever they have to say. Tell Captain Travers when he calls—for, of course, he will call on hearing this—that I am proud of my little girl."

He attempted a laugh as he left the room, for he feared when he was gone she would give way to grief, and he could not bear the thought of it for his sunny-hearted daughter.

What, then, was his surprise when he came down from his wife's room and was passing through the hall on his way out. Nan came quietly from the library, and, slipping her hand under his arm, walked with him to the steps where the carriage was waiting to take him to the station, a brave smile on her lips, and her voice steady and natural, uttering little commonplaces, though her face was white and set as death.

And, her smile still in his thoughts, he drove away, marveling greatly at the endurance of women, even this frail daughter of his, well worthy, he thought, to be a daughter of the Union; while Nan

re-entered the house, and carried the flowers up to her mother's room, leaving them at the door in the hands of the nurse, who told her, speaking low, that there was no change, and it was impossible as yet to tell how the fever would turn. Then she again went down stairs to learn the duties of the house, of which she knew very little, therefore committing many blunders with the best of grace, though she was tempted many times to leave the work in the hands of the servants who evidently knew so much more than she about the management of the house. Had there been no other housekeeper than she, it is doubtful what sort of a dinner would have been placed on the table that night, but as it was with a competent woman in charge, things passed off smoothly enough.

By and by, tired exceedingly, and sadly disappointed at not being allowed to see her mother, Nan went down in the garden to her favorite seat in the summer-house, dreading the callers she knew would come, now that they had had a chance to recover. She had had no time to even glance at the morning paper, and watching the paper for every item of news of the war was one of the duties she never failed in, half sad with their accounts of those dead and wounded, glad when she found no entry of her brothers' names among that terrible list, though now and then her eyes had been brightened by an account, only a few words it might be, but meaning so much to her, of the bravery evinced by Private Frank Courtland, or the glimpse of a wild bit of magnificent fighting done by Captain Charlie Courtland at the head of his company.

How many times she had opened the sheet with trembling hands, a chill of fear at her heart that

she might see what seemed to her she could not bear to see, yet not daring to lay it aside unread, when it might hold the secret of how much to her. Day after day she went over the same anxious search, thankful each day that gave no sadder news than the long list—always, it seemed to her, a long list—of those who had fallen or were missing.

Going down the garden walk now, she held the paper in her hands, scarcely daring to open it, feeling that another blow would surely crush her. She heard the door-bell ring with its muffled tongue that startled her by its strangeness, but she could not go in just then, no matter who had called; she must have a few minutes to recover herself; she must breathe the air—the air was what she needed—the air of the sweet old garden with the flowers around her—Frank's flowers and Charlie's. They lifted up their faces to her like old friends; they soothed and rested her with their sweetness and their silence.

"Do I intrude, Nan?" asked a familiar voice, and she turned with a feeling of restfulness and gladness to the old friend who would give her cheer and courage by his courage.

"Oh, Captain Travers!" she cried, meeting him with outstretched hand, her face lighting with pleasure. "Indeed, this is good of you, when you start to-morrow. I wish I were going with you as a brother soldier."

"I don't doubt it," he said, laughing, and his laugh was good to hear. "I don't doubt it, Nan, but that is no reason why you should give me my title here. But if you were in battle, it would take a short charge to make you General Courtland for bravery and tact. Oh, yes, you look innocent enough, but

I'm not to be fooled. I've heard all about you, Nan, and I shall report you at headquarters as deserving of promotion."

"But isn't it terrible about mamma, Ned? I haven't seen her since early this morning. The nurse won't allow me in the room, and at the door I can hear her talking, talking, about the boys, papa said —always about the boys as they were before this terrible war. When will it end? Will it ever end, Ned?"

"Oh, yes," he replied, cheerily, gently pushing her down upon the seat within the door of the summer-house, and sitting on the step at her feet, for he saw she was over-excited and much depressed. "Oh, yes, it will end, though it may not in some time, but end it must, Nan."

"I wish I could help end it," she said, wistfully. "It is so much easier to fight than to stay at home and wait, and wait we never know what for, nor what we will see when we take up the paper——"

She broke off here, lifting the paper in her hands as she looked down at him almost piteously, a wan little smile on her lips.

"See what a coward I am," she cried. "I haven't dared look at it this whole day. It seems as though if anything else should——"

"There are accounts of the killed and wounded," he said, with quick kindness, "as usual, and a glowing description of General Pope's struggle against Lee to save Washington, but there is nothing you need fear personally, Nan. You have enough to bear just now without that. What is this trouble of your father's? It will be a heavy drain on him, will it not, losing so much at once? I hope it is no worse than I heard?"

"Oh," she said, vehemently, "how could it be worse, Ned? A clear twenty-five thousand dollars out of his own, to say nothing of the fifty thousand dollars of Mr. Blake's. And all our silver, save the heaviest pieces, that are in the safety vaults, and every bit of jewelry I had here—which wasn't much—excepting the diamond ring Aunt Amelia left me when she died. Not that I care for the jewelry itself, Ned, only all together you can judge of the loss, and if the worst came, you know, one could easily dispose of jewelry. Father is so worried over it, coming as it does with this dreadful illness of mamma. You would hardly have known him had you seen him this morning, he seemed to have grown so old."

"But Blake wouldn't think of demanding his money," the young man broke in, indignantly, his brown eyes flashing. "He's mean enough for almost anything, but he could not think of such a thing as that. He took the risk. It isn't your father's fault."

"No," Nan said, gravely; "it isn't father's fault, Ned, but you know what Mr. Blake is, and we feared he might claim his loss, and father said it would cripple him so in business if he had to make that good with his own loss that he intended to forward for the use of the government in raising forces, for we shall need extra forces soon if the war doesn't end. But Mr. Blake came over——"

"Of course," interrupted the young captain, with an emphatic gesture of the arm that had caused his absence from the army for a month. "It's just like the impudent fellow."

"He came over," Nan continued, impressively, "and has made arrangements with father to wait

for a fair chance of the money's being recovered, and if it is not, he will make some other agreement that he told me himself he thought would be entirely satisfactory."

"Oh, he did?" and there was more sarcasm than surprise in his voice. "Well, look here, Nan, all I've got to say on the subject is that you had best look out for him, and be prepared for almost anything from him. It isn't in Blake to loose his hold of a cent without good returns. But there, I have nothing against him except that he had better behave himself in regard to you," and he laughed easily that the girl should not understand his meaning, for down in his heart he guessed pretty near the truth that the man would hold this power over Nan if possible, to win her.

"I'm not afraid of him," Nan said, "only he'd better not try to get the best of father. Do you know, Ned, if father wasn't so sadly lame that the government wouldn't accept him, I believe he'd enter the army to-morrow. Look how he sent the boys away—proud that they wished to go."

"That is the spirit that wins, Nan," Captain Travers said, gravely. "What do you guess Helen intends doing?"

"I know," in a low voice, nervously folding and unfolding the paper on her knee. "We have talked it over a good many times, Ned, and now, I suppose, since you came home so badly wounded, needing the care only a woman can give, she will put our talks into practice, and go to the hospitals, where every nurse is needed and will constantly be needed more and more. Oh," she stood up before him, and stretched out her hands imploringly, "if only I could go, Ned—if only I could go, too. Who knows

but one of our boys is needing our care this minute while I am idle here. Our Frank, or our big, brave Charlie."

She sank back into her seat, the momentary flush of excitement leaving her paler than before.

"I know," the young man said, and he laid his hand firmly over the two little white hands clasped in her lap. "But, after all, Nan, it is braver to stay right here, wishing to go as you do, when your mother and father need you so much, than to go to the war as a brave little soldier. It's a great deal harder for a soldier to stand watching a battle, sternly in reserve, than to dash into the very thickest of the fight and have it out in action; but some must stand back to take the places that are left vacant or where would come the victory? We soldiers know who are the brave ones, Nan, without any telling."

She gave him a slow, grateful smile, and there was silence between them for a moment; then she asked, trying to keep her voice steady:

"When will she go, Ned?"

"She goes on with me to morrow, Nan. She wished you to be with her to-night, but now that it is impossible, she will come to you this evening."

Then, rising swiftly to his feet, he turned and caught her hands vehemently in his, his eyes searching the frank blue eyes lifted to his.

"Good-by," he said, slowly, the effort to keep his voice steady making it almost harsh. "Good-by, Nan, dear. God keep you wherever you are."

Her eyes, meeting his, grew unconsciously wistful, and tears stole into them as she said, gently:

"If you have time, will you let me hear from you, Ned, so that I may know how you are getting on? I

shall always wish to know, and long to go, too, that I might be one more to help end the war."

They had been good friends all their lives, why shouldn't she ask him this? But a flush arose in his face, and she winced from the pain of her hands in his stern clasp.

"You shall hear," he said, steadily, "if you wish, Nan. Again, good-by, and now and always, God keep you and yours."

She stood looking after him with her wide, wet eyes as he strode out through the garden, tall, broad-shouldered, fit, indeed, to be a soldier, she thought; and with an army like him, how could the war last much longer? But there was an ache at her heart as she walked slowly back to the house, knowing full well that there were others waiting her there, and that she must act as though there were nothing the matter other than happened every day.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### TWO DAUGHTERS OF THE UNION.

"When Miss Travers calls this evening, show her at once to the library, John," Nan said, to the butler, as she passed into the parlor, where several friends were waiting on her return from the garden. And when the numerous questions as to the incidents of the previous night, exclamations and protestations as to the audacity of the thieves, the exceeding marvel of her courage under the trying circumstances, sorrow at her mother's illness, and regrets for her father's loss—when these were over, and her guests, one after another through the long summer afterenoon, had gone, and the day set in to evening,

Nan and her father were sitting in the library, the girl listening with interest to her father's account of the day's doings in the city, the long account in the papers of the daring burglary in the very outskirts of the city—an exciting account even in the midst of the war columns—Nan, sitting at the squire's feet, her soft fingers now and then caressing the other's wrinkled hand, the hearts of each filled with anxiety for the dear mother in the hushed room above, from which they were excluded—the butler suddenly announced Miss Travers, and Nan sprang up with a glad cry, her hands outstretched to the tall, slender girl in the door-way.

"This is so like you, Helen," she said, lifting her red mouth for the caress of her friend. "Your very last night at home to give to us. You're the dearest girl. Isn't she, papa?"

The new-comer laughed softly, the beautiful hazel eyes darkening with pleasure as she stooped, her hands on Nan's shoulders, to kiss the dainty lady before her.

"Don't help to humiliate me, Mr. Courtland, by professed belief in my goodness. It was pure selfishness on my part. Do you think I could go away without a good-by from my girl?"

"You have come to a sad home, Helen," the squire said, with a warm pressure of her hand, though there was no smile on his lips. "But how few homes are not sad now."

"Yes," the girl said, and the eyes lifted to his grave face were tender with sympathy. "War is a terrible thing, Mr. Courtland, and the worst is the suspense—the waiting for what we cannot know, the inability to end it by just our own efforts. War claims the whole country, and the country must do

her work well. Isn't Mrs. Courtland any better? I hoped I would find some improvement."

"She is sleeping now," he responded, as he returned to his seat under the drop-light, and took up the paper; "but it isn't a natural sleep, Helen. The physicians said she must be quieted, and they have placed her under the influence of opiates. As you say, the worst and hardest to bear is the waiting, and we wait shut out from her room. But we hope for the best, my daughter and I."

"Poor papa," Nan said, as she and her friend settled themselves in the window seat at the farthest end of the room where the light fell softly upon them through the sweeping folds of the lace drapery. "How much he has to bear, Helen. Yet, if it were not for him and mamma, and that I am needed here, I would go with you to-morrow. What a proud girl you must be to go to the war and be of use in helping along the Union."

"It will be sadder than you think, Nan," Helen said, smoothing the white, clinging fingers of her friend. "Oh, so much sadder than we ever dreamed. Ned has told me so much of what I must see and go through, and the terrible, terrible suffering I will constantly be called upon to witness and assist in relieving, and the need of steady nerves and utter self-forgetfulness, that I tremble to think how I may fail. Oh, Nan, war is so terrible, so terrible! How can I ever bear to see them brought in—our brave blue laddies!—mutilated, dying, and to see them die, unable to help them. Oh, Nan, Nan, I am afraid I shall turn coward in the very midst of their bravery. Ned told me when he first came home on this leave, of one of the young fellows—he couldn't have been more than twenty—who begged so hard

for the surgeons and nurses to do something, anything for him, so long as he could get well—he could bear any agony, he said, any operation, no matter what it might be, if they would only save him, for he must live to care for his mother—he was all she had. And, oh, Nan, they could do nothing but make his death as easy as possible. And Ned said there were strong men there bearing their own suffering without a murmur, who cried like babies when the poor boy died. When I think of all these things, how can I bear it, Nan? But I must go. I must do what I can, if it is only a little. Even if I may but give a cup of water to a dying soldier, or lift his head, or do some little thing, it will be doing something, and I cannot bear inaction when I know what ought to be done, and I have nothing to hinder me. Hilda is home with mother, and as she is quite grown now—sixteen, you know—she can easily take my place. Of course I couldn't go but for that."

Nan's lips were set, and her eyes purple with the intensity of her thought. She scarcely heard Helen's last words. She was with her brothers on the battlefield. Suppose at that moment Frank or Charlie were dying, or dead, or wounded fearfully, as Helen said. Suppose there were no friendly hands near, no woman's tender voice and face to help him bear his pain; no woman's touch on his hair. Why was it that it was always Frank's fair head and boyish face that faced her in the thoughts of the dead and wounded in the field—no woman's hand holding the cup of water to his lips, or closing the sightless eyes that had always held a smile in them for her?

Her hand was like ice to the touch of her friend, and Helen suddenly leaned forward, lifting her white face in her hands.

"Nannie, Nannie, it was cruel of me to tell you this. I should have known how you would take it. Ned said I must tell you none of it"—even in the pain of her thoughts it was sweet to think that Ned had thought of her—"he wouldn't tell me, after this first story of the poor boy. There are pleasant things to think about the war and our boys, and why think of this sad story? They are not all dead or wounded, Nan. Some of them go through the thickest of the fight, and come out unharmed, and our boys say it is that some pure woman is thinking of them. If we can't all go, dear, we can stay at home and pray, and keep our thoughts of them pure and our faith unshaken. We accepted the risks when we sent them away, and we would not call them back till their duty is done. My brother goes back to-morrow, Nan, and yours are there. Come, unless you smile I shall go away, knowing that I begin by being a coward."

Nan shook her head sadly, no stirring of a smile on her white lips.

"I haven't heard from Frank," she said, slowly, her voice as cold and set as her face. "I haven't heard from Frank in three weeks, Helen, and he promised to write regularly when he could."

"Of course," Helen said, with quick cheerfulness and a flitting smile that somehow eased her friend's heart. "Of course, Nan, and so he will; but as Ned has told me, there are so many things coming up now that one doesn't expect, and had never thought of that put all thoughts of letter-writing out of one's head. You know, Nan, I would not say this if it were not so."

"I know," Nan answered, gravely, but the trouble in her eyes set a shadow in the darker ones oppo-

site. "But there!" she shook her head, sunny with its curls, as though to cast off all trouble, and her face was again the bright face of Nan Courtland. "This is a fine way to send you off to battle, Helen Travers. I've always protested that I was selfish and not at all to be relied upon for courage, and this is convincing proof."

"Indeed, no!" and Helen laughed, glad that her friend could laugh again, though knowing well what lay under the bright surface. "But, let's talk of something else. Have you heard anything, or gained any more knowledge of the thieves, Nan? It seems to me that the detectives we have nowadays ought not to let such daring burglars escape them. Wouldn't you know them if you should see them again?"

"I only saw one," Nan replied, entering into her friend's kindly spirit, "and I really didn't see him, Nell; he had a mask on, but I would know his voice and figure, I am quite sure. I only wish I could have a chance to test my memory."

"You ought to have a chance pretty soon," Helen said. "They can't escape, I'm sure; can they, Mr. Courtland?"

She pushed the curtains aside, and leaned forward, the gas-light touching her sweet face to added beauty as she turned toward the squire, waiting his reply, noting, with a sorry pain at her heart, the deepened lines of care on the face that had always a smile of greeting for her, and that now involuntarily smiled back at her piquant face between the falls of lace at the window.

"Others have escaped," he said, "and with clever detectives on their tracks, too. It's getting pretty hard just now to ferret out such thieves, for with so

many of our best men away from home, fighting for the Union, these rogues have a greater chance for escape than during peaceful times. These are some of the fortunes of war. In this instance we have lost our money, while many have lost their lives. It is one of the world's great laws that the good of a nation lies upon the shoulders of her men, and shall be held by the price of blood if necessary. It is only after war that we have peace. We hold the right by might, and our willingness to suffer for it."

"Yes, and such men as Mr. Blake, staying safely at home looking after his own affairs with watchful care, not even using his money to help on the war," Nan cried, with still deeper bitterness; "and making no pretense of caring how the end shall come so long as it does not touch his pocket. A big, strong man like him to shrink, while hundreds nowhere near his strength or his stature, are fighting to the very last for their homes and their right. And, oh, he is very generous—for him—to 'wait' awhile, and give us a chance to recover his money; and, of course, if it isn't found—— Well, I'll not talk of him to-night. We're speaking of heroes."

"For Mr. Blake to do even that," Helen said, laughing, "is a great concession on his part, I assure you, Nan. You should feel greatly honored."

"Well, we're not," and Nan was fairly spiteful. "He has no right to demand the return of his money. He ran every risk of losing it, and it wasn't father's fault. I'd like to know if father didn't lose almost as much as he."

"But that isn't the thing, Nan," the squire said, as though despairing of ever making his daughter see the business side of the matter. "This money

was in my possession when it was stolen, consequently I am held responsible for it."

"I don't see how," Nan still protested, in warm defense of his rights. "I don't see how he can hold you responsible any more than for a horse of his that might be stolen from the stables when he hired stable room of you, or requested the room for his animal over night, or anything else of his he might leave in your house or on your estate."

Her father laughed.

"I have done my best to convince you of the right and wrong of it," he said, "and now all I can do is to let things prove themselves. At any rate, this delay in settlement is an advantage to me. I have so much more time to retrieve myself, you see," turning to Helen. "It is well business doesn't lie in your hands under the circumstances, for I tremble at what might happen."

"Nothing very serious," Nan retorted, saucily, her spirits rising under her father's laughter, so good for her to hear. "Nothing more serious than your utter surprise at our success, for if business were in our hands we'd make it a special study, and master the art just as soon as you, grand lords of creation. Maybe we don't understand business because you don't give us a chance. When you come home from the office you lock the doors and lock in your business, and we at home seldom hear of it save as something so far beyond us as not to be discussed with us or in our presence; and then you turn upon us when we offer a remark or a suggestion as to business, and tell us calmly we say so and so because we don't understand business. Oh, you think it's just to put us aside and honestly believe we are not capable of grasping the intricate machinery be-

cause you shut it from us, just as you know nothing about the frigid zone because of the ice-barred passage. You men should be just to us as well as generous."

"Phew!" exclaimed the squire, with renewed animation at this totally unexpected development of his daughter's character. "What's this, what's this that I hear! Miss Courtland, the pretty belle, giving us a lecture on our business life and our manners. Heigho, but Travers should hear that, Helen. And I'm sure Mr. Blake would learn something to his advantage from such an eloquent discourse."

"Well," Nan maintained, stoutly, though a flush crept to her cheeks at mention of Captain Travers, "you may laugh at me all you wish, papa, it's the truth, and you know it—every single word. Nell knows it, too, though she would never show her knowledge save by going down in camp and nursing the wounded and dying, with a patience and a sweetness beyond the power of any man who laughs at the weakness of women. 'Frailty' forsooth! What would men do without us, I'd like to know?"

"Don't call up such a horrible condition," her father rejoined, laughing in his quiet, hearty way. Then a sudden remembrance of the woman up stairs —the dearest woman in the world to him during the years of their married life, and they had been many —who, at any moment, nay, at that very moment, might be taken from him, and his mood changed, and he was again very still behind the columns of the paper.

"Poor papa!" Nan whispered, lifting her wet eyes to her friend, as they stood together in the hall before parting, and the woman who had accompanied Helen was donning her hat in the servants' hall.

"Poor, dear papa, Helen! What would he do—what would any of us do, if——"

The thought was terrible, and she was incapable of finishing the sentence, but Helen understood, and for answer stooped and kissed the girl's quivering red mouth.

"And now, good-by, Nan," she said, bravely. "Ned told me he has said his good-by. He would not come with me to-night," she was smoothing over and over one of the tiny curls around her finger, that fell so bewitchingly on the fair forehead of her friend. "You shall hear from me as regularly as circumstances will permit, but you must make allowances for all the letters you do not receive. I know how much you will wish to hear, and so far as possible you shall not be disappointed. Keep up a brave heart, dear, and all will be well. You shall pray for me, and I will pray for you, Nan, and if——" her voice, too, broke for a moment in its brave utterance; but she took up the words again steadily enough. "If either of your brothers come to me, Nan, be sure I will treat them well. And remember, I, too, have a brother in the war."

"Yes," Nan said, ashamed of her tears before this girl's brave soul. "Yes, I know; and I leave them all in your hands, Helen Travers. See that you do not violate the trust."

And then, after a silence, a whispered word or two, these two daughters of the Union had unclasped their hands, and parted, who knows, save God, for how long, nor what should befall each ere another meeting in the silent, shadowy hall.

## CHAPTER V.

### A GLIMMER OF HOPE.

A quiet moonlight evening in the heart of Virginia; a dark-eyed, dark-skinned girl sat alone at the wide east window in the kitchen at the Manse, set in the midst of its pines, with the odorous winds stealing stealthily through the faintly stirring boughs.

The hour was late, and the girl alone, yet so busy with thoughts that she never felt the silence of the shadowy room, in which the only light was from the golden moon sailing up the open space between the trees, softly touching the lifted dark face with its wide, pathetic eyes.

Presently the door opened noiselessly, but a subtle sense of excitement entered the room with the man who strode to the girl's side. She arose, confronting him with a soft word of welcome.

"I thought you'd gone long 'go, Mr. Brown," she said, lifting her large black eyes to the face near her, her nostrils dilating with the strange excitement that pervaded the room at his entrance. He was a tall young fellow, with the black eyes and hair and peculiar skin that at first might mislead one into thinking him a Spaniard, but when he spoke, his nationality was clearly that of the girl. He laid his hand on her arm, not roughly, but with an air of command as he said, in a hushed voice:

"Yo' know 't I couldn' go 'thout yo', Lola. Ef 'twere to save my life, 'stead o' my freedom, yo' know 't I couldn' go 'thout yo'. I'se tole yo' of'en

'nough 't I lov' yo', an' spite o' startin' out ter git free—for we'd a-been mos' ter ther States by now—I lef' ther others ter go on ef they would, an' kem back fer yo'. Will yo' go now, Lola Richy? I ain't a-goin' ter take no foolin' this time. I'se tole yo' 't I lov' yo', an' lov' is fer life, an' ef yo' ain't a-goin' ter git 'way—an' we's bofe free, yo' an' me, by rights—why, I'se 'bout made up my min' ter stay boun', too. But yo's got ter mak' up yo' min' purty quick, fer I'se ter meet ther res' of 'em in ha'f an hour, an' I wants time ter git thar 'thout bein' cotched. De sojers is mighty nigh ther creek, an' I'se got ter be powerfu' keerfu' not ter hev 'em down on me like a pile o' hot cakes. What'll yo' do, Lola?"

The warm red of the girl's dark cheeks had faded, but there was a gleam in her eyes, and a line of sternness about her mouth, that boded well or ill for the eager suitor who would give up his chance of freedom for her sake.

"I'se tole yo', Mr. Brown, 't I'd go—yo' know 't I'd go in a minnet ef 't warn't fer mammy—but I can't hav' my freedom 'thout mammy. She's free as we, or oughter be, fer she wasn't rightfully a slave, as yo' know, an' I can't leave her. She'd giv' her life fer us, if she could, an' I can't go ter ther States an' be free an' know 't she's lef' down thar boun'. Ef she could go, I'd go in a minnet, Mr. Brown, an' yo' know 't, but I can't leave mammy."

"Well, yo' know she can't go, Lola, fer we can't git her 'thout bein' cotched by the sojers, an' worse of 'n ever. Ef we could git her, we'd git her, but we can't, an' ter stay boun' yo'se'f ain't a-goin' ter mak' her happ'r; ef she think so much o' yo' 's yo' say, she'll be powerfu' glad ter hab yo' go git freedom 'way frum here, where a culled pusson ain' no

mo' 'count 'n a dog, an' not ha'f 's much sometimes. But I can't be a-foolin'. Ef yo' 'll go, say so; ef yo' won't go, say thet, too, on'y be quick, I tell yer, fer time is a-passin'."

The girl turned from the room, and passed out to the little porch at the door, with a motion of her hand for her companion to follow her.

The house was near the bank of the James River, and listening intently, one could catch the far-off sound of camp-life, and the gleam and flash of the fire now and then when the faint breeze lifted the flames.

Out on the porch, in view of this Confederate encampment, the girl paused. She was trembling with excitement, but her voice was soft and mellow when she spoke. Her eyes were large and luminous, and looked off away from her companion to the round full moon climbing above the pines like a peaceful queen.

"Et's safer here," Lola said; "we ain't nebber shu' 't some one ain't a-watchin' an' list'nin' ter git outen us what we's up ter. I ain't nebber cotched one, no," she hastened to add, in her low voice, soft with the languor of the South, as a flash in her companion's eyes warned her what would follow treachery; "but I don' want ter giv' 'em a chance ter git at me."

"They'd better leav' yo' 'lone," the man said, again laying his hand on her arm. "Ef theys tetch yo'——"

He broke off suddenly, glancing up at the mounting moon.

"Tell me quick!" he whispered, and only she could hear. "Ef it's yes or no, say it, fer I'se ter be at ther creek in a few minnets, an' can't wait. Et's

freedom an' a resk fer it .or slavery, an' mebby no resk, but a powerfu' sight worse. So choose, an' I'll be off."

To get away from the chains that bound her unlawfully; to be free—free as she should be, but for man's treachery; to get to the North, where all men were free, the white and the black—free as God made them, each with his life and his soul to make or mar. And all she need do was to go with this man as he wished, to follow his directions with no responsibility upon her but to obey; to be married—that was his plan—as soon as they should reach a place where it would be possible, and then to go to Boston, where they would be safe, and live their lives as they would. But how could she do this, and leave her mother still in bondage, a bondage that had always been hateful to her, bound as she was through a white man's treachery, ay, and bound, without any bonds, to another white man, through treachery worse than the first.

The page of her life flashed up in the heart of the mulatto as she stood with her lover watching the cloudless moon.

Her grandmother, one of the Shawnee tribe of Indians, had been bound out to a gentleman until she was eighteen; then she was to be given her liberty, and left free to go where she pleased. Instead of this, the man, who had treated her well enough, but was too much given to the races and the gaming table to hesitate if one of his servants stood in the way, had taken her to a town some seventy miles from his home, promising her at the end of the journey the papers that would set her free. And then, when he left her at a house to go out, presumably to attend to some business in regard to these papers,

but did not return, she learned, when she asked of a lady in the room why he did not return, she learned the bitter, crushing truth—that he had sold her only the day before to the lady of the house where she was.

The bitterness of her lot, free as she should have been at that moment, free as the birds of the air, yet bound irrevocably for life, with only the bare drop of sweet in her cup from her good-natured mistress that she would arrange in her will that she should never be sold again after her death—the bitterness settled upon her like the chill of death, creeping up and up from faint comprehension to a full knowledge of what was upon her. And what could she do? She knew nothing of law, nothing of a way to right her wrong; all men who had authority were against her, and would let the man go free; she had nowhere to turn, and she bore the blow as many another such has been borne.

By and by she married. Her husband was a sailor, in whose veins ran the purest African blood. He was kind to her when he was at home, and when her baby came, her heart was softened and her bonds almost forgotten. Then, when the child grew with a wild beauty of her own, with the high-spirited free blood of the forest and the hot deserts of the East in her veins, and the mother, even in bondage, watched her grow and ripen to womanhood, in love and pride, the best loved of all her children, the blow fell upon them from the treachery of another white man who had promised the girl her freedom, promised her all things for her good, that her wrong should be righted and her life made happy—for to her proud spirit it was like death to be bound in slavery—and had violated his trust, and

instead of the promised freedom her life was ruined —her life and her soul. And when the father came home from a voyage and found a babe in his daughter's arms, and no ring on her finger, his proud spirit arose, and he swore to kill her for the evil she had brought upon him and his name; but his anger was cooled by the soft words of his wife and the beauty of the child—his first grandchild—and the baby lived and thrived, and here she was also grown to womanhood, standing on the brink of freedom with a lover waiting her word, and the mother who had toiled early and late for money to hire herself, her mother and her child from their master—the mother who would gladly give her life for hers, who would think no torture too hard to endure if her daughter would so escape it—the mother, bound with the cruel chains that had galled her proud spirit and eaten at her heart—the mother was far away, and if she accepted this chance of freedom she must take it without her.

Could she leave her? Could she go away knowing to what her mother was left? But, after all, what good could she do her by remaining? She would only be an added burden, an added expense, and if she got away from the South free, with a home of her own, could she not in some way then secure her mother's freedom also?

The thoughts came and went like flashes of light, so swift that her lover still stood waiting, his hand on her shoulder, for her decision. He could not ask her to decide too quickly; he knew what he was asking, and how much sweet there was with the bitter. And there was his love, and there was her freedom, and he waited patiently for her answer, quite sure what it would be.

One swift glance up at the quiet moon, a mute prayer in her heart that her mother might know, and she turned quietly to her companion, her dark eyes meeting his steadily.

"I will go," she said, and he bent his head to hear. "I trust yo', Jim. When 'll I be reddy?"

"At nine o'clock at night, day after to-morrow," he answered, briefly, but he stooped to kiss her. She drew herself back proudly, and her eyes flashed with a new light.

"Not yet," she said, quietly. "Wait till we's free. There's much to go throo 'et 'll be men's work. Treat me as a man till it's over. An' ef yo' prove untrue——" There was a strange tingling sound in her voice, but her eyes finished the sentence.

A flush and a frown darkened his face under the soft moonlight; he drew himself up, as though by so doing he shook off his chains forever; his voice was deep with passion when he spoke.

"Ef yo'se got no mo' faith in me 'n that, Lola, mebby it'd be bes' fer yo' ter stay boun' an' a slabe," he said. "Freedom ain't fer them 'ts cowards, an' worse."

Her eyes were gentle as the moonlight when she lifted them to his face; her voice was low and mellow.

"Ain't Ise tole yo' 't Ise trus' yo', Jim? But there's others 't hav' trusted 'fore now to their sorrow. I on'y warn yo'. Ef yo' lov' me as yo' say, there ain't no need o' warnin' yo'. Tell me wot I'll do."

Her words quieted his anger. Time was passing, and he must hasten; he knew well the consequences that would follow discovery in their plan.

"By nine o' Sat'day night—this 's Thu'sd'y—be

reddy et yo' winder. I'll be underneath, an' when I tap 'gainst ther wall like this," he struck lightly the stone side of the house near them, "yo'se ter creep down stairs still's yo' kin, an' meet me here. There's ten o' us a-goin ; we's got a boat hid in ther brush below in the ribber, an' we's ter git there 'thout mo' noise 'n we kin help, min' yo' dat, else de sojers'll git us shuah. An' as there's ter be mos'ly men, Lola, mebby it'd be bes' fer yo' ter go 'long as one, tell we's git some'ers whar dere ain't no danger, fer yo' couldn't run nohow as yo'd want ter run ef ther sojers did git after us, with yo' long gowns a-trailin' arfter us. Don' yo' breathe dis to no one, an' be reddy sharp. Yo' know de consequences o' bein' foun' out."

A cold terror struck the girl; she shivered in the heat of the summer night; her hand was like ice as it touched his, and she merely nodded—she dared not speak. Knew? Ay, truly she knew. There had been such things before, and the end was death —death—shot like brutes or mad, wild creatures, by men who had no mercy for their defenseless slaves, who set the blood-hounds on their tracks and hunted them to death. Yes, she knew—but death, after all —death, even here in the morning of her life—death was preferable to life with chains cutting her heart and her hopes.

A slow smile—so slow and sad in its intensity that the man's heart throbbed with a new and deeper determination to win in the struggle for her sake—broke the stony lines of her face; the color returned to the dark cheeks, and the eyes were glowing with dawning hope.

"I ain't 'fraid," she said, and a mellow laugh stirred her parted lips. "After all, Mr. Brown, wes

ain't got nothin' ter do in this but ther bes' we kin, an' ther Lawd'll tend ther res'. Ef we's ter be free, we'll git thar, an' ef we ain't, we ain't. Et's a-gettin' late, an' I won't keep yo' no longer, on'y tak' care o' yo'se'f. Ther sojers is over thar, an' dey's watchin'—nebber yo' fear but dey's watchin'. Dey ain't a-goin' ter gib us up ter Mr. Linkum 'thout fightin' fer it."

"Yo' 's 'bout right dere, Lola," the man said, and he laughed, too, looking down into her bright eyes that met his so bravely; "but Mr. Linkum's men kin fight, too. Oh, dey's all a-goin' ter fight ef fightin' 's what yo' want. Well, I'se goin', an' don' yo' fergit what I tole yo'."

She shrugged her shoulders scornfully, and flashed a merry glance at him. A new spirit seemed to have taken possession of her with the thoughts of freedom.

"Fergit," she said. "Would yo' be lik'ly ter fergit ef yo' were goin' ter hab a million dollars lef' yo'? Reckon not; an' dat's de same way wid me. Good-night, Jim."

She watched him pass the flood of moonlight in the lower path, and then melt among the shadows of the shrubbery, as though he, too, were but a shadow; then she entered the house, and fastening the window and the door, putting the key of the latter in her pocket, she went down to Mammy Judy's cabin, where she lived. But it was among the wee hours of the morning ere she fell asleep, for her mind was too active to allow of sleep.

Whether or not they would succeed in getting away, and if they did, what they would find in the new home they sought, all these thoughts kept her eyes wide open for hours after she had lain down.

Of the end that would come if they were caught—the end of her life almost at its beginning—she scarcely yet could think with calmness. Of her mother, so many miles away, who could not dream of what her daughter was planning, her thoughts lingered longest, and with her lover, who would share unlawful bondage with her rather than accept freedom alone. And then her thoughts went out to the man, and he was a good man, whom her mother wished her to marry, who had fairly wrung a promise from her on her last visit home—for her mother still hired her child from her master, and sent her out to service—that she would think of the offer made her, though she did not and never could love him. A minister with a kindly heart, who would give her a good home compared with her home, and who would so place her out of harm's way by giving her his name. She knew it was the mother love and fear that wished this for her, that would by so doing protect her from such a bitter fate as her own. But would it not be as well to marry this man whom she was bringing herself to love?

Then a new and somewhat troublous thought arose in her mind. Could she go away as she was planning, and leave the other girls in the house to the fate she would escape? One of these girls was very young, barely fifteen, and who, if she kept to the promise of beauty she then gave, would find life more dangerous and harder than it was then, and her life was hard enough, for the others seemed to have a hatred for her, and placed on her the hardest work and any blame they could. No; she would not leave her, anyway, and she would gladly go, she knew—gladly take the risk, and bear all hardships

to be free. Yes, Nina should go; Jim told her to tell no one, but Nina was different; and if she told Nina, why not the others, and give them the chance with her? They would accept—they must accept; and if they did not—well, she could not go and leave them without giving them the chance.

And then sleep stole upon her, mingling in her dreams thoughts of her lover and her mother, and the opening of the new life; and dangers and terrors which she had never thought of came to her then; and with the first gleams of daylight she awoke, cold with horror and trembling lest it be true. But after awhile, with a prayer for strength, she took up her daily duties, and no one guessed from her manner that anything unusual would happen.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### WAITING FOR DEATH.

Nina was crossing the hall when Lola stopped her with a gesture. It was at the lower end of the hall near a window overlooking the James, and in the farther distance the moving figures of the camp and the glitter of sunlight now and then flashing on sword and bayonet. Lola's finger was on her lip, and Nina waited silently for her to speak.

"I'se a-goin' 'way from hyar to-morrow, Nina," Lola said, her voice so low the other had to watch her lips to understand. "Keep still fo' yo' life. Ef enyone should kno'——" she paused for a moment, glancing behind, but the younger girl knew full well her meaning; her eyes grew wide with an unknown terror; she knew nothing of hope. "I'se

goin' 'way up No'th with some others," Lola continued, satisfied that no one was spying upon them. "We's goin' ter git 'way quiet to-morrer night, an' git up No'th an' be free—free, do yo' hyar dat, Nina?"

The girl nodded. She had heard of freedom; she knew that Mr. Lincoln and the men up North were fighting to set them free, which their masters said was impossible, and that this girl dared even think of escaping to freedom was past her comprehension.

"Yo' 's to keep yo' mouth shet," Lola went on, still in that low, monotonous voice only her companion could understand. "Doan' yo' dar' breethe thes fer yo' life. But ef yo' wants ter git 'way, too, an' be free an' like odder folks as ain't treated like dawgs, yo' ken come wid us. Dar's a good deal ter go t'rough, but when we gits dar whar eberybody's his own master like our master hyar—culled folks an' awl—doan' yo' t'ink et'll pay fer eberyt'ing wes hab ter stan' ter git thar—de col', an' de hungry, an' de wadin' froo de swamps, an' mebby de sojers an' de blood-houn's, an' awl? Et may be awl dat, an' et may be mo', an' likewise et may be none o' et, but Ise wants yer ter kno' de whole. Et's powerfu' hyard ter git our freedom, but et'll pay ef we git et, an' de Lawd an' Mr. Linkum'll se't we's awl right w'en wes git up No'th. Es yo' fer goin', Nina? Ef yo' stay, t'ings'll be a-gittin' wuss an' wuss tell yo' wish yo' nebber been bawn. Ise know mown yo' do, chile; I'se seed et awl; an' et 'll be starv' an' starv' w'en de war gits wuss, fer de w'te folks an' de sojers'll eat eberyting up, an' nothin' lef' fer de culled folks 'cept de bones wid de dawgs. Es yo' goin', Nina?"

The girl was trembling with excitement between

her desire to go, as Lola said, and be free, away from the South, and her fear of the consequences, for there was not a negro in the South but knew what followed an unsucessful attempt for freedom. And still hundreds of them accepted the dangers and struggled out of bondage, accepting even life in the swamps to the cruel chains and heavy burdens of slavery.

"Yo's shure dey won't fin' et out, Lola, an' kill us?" whispered the girl, excitedly. "Yo' shure ob dat?"

Lola laid her hand kindly on her companion's shoulder—the shoulder that bore more than one mark of the lash.

"Ise cawn't promise yo' dat fer certain, Nina; dey may fin' us, an' may shoot us, but fer my part I'd radder die dan lib lik' dis. Et's worse'n de'th a hunned time, Nina, an' ef we go, a-puttin' our trus' in de Lawd A'mighty, He'll see't we's took car' ob. De culled folks has as good a chance wid Him as de w'ite folks—Mr. Johnsing tells us so ebery Sabb'th day, chile."

"Yes," Nina said, indifferently. It seemed to her that the Lord wasn't specially good to them when he allowed such suffering and cruelty to fall upon them, and just then if she could get away she would have more faith in her own powers of stealth and endurance than in the hand of the Lord.

"Well, I'll go," she said, setting her teeth firmly together. "I'll resk et, too, Lola. Et can't be worse'n de'th."

Lola pressed her hand affectionately down upon her shoulder.

"We's ter go as men," she said. "Dress yo'se'f

'cordingly, Nina, an' be't my room at ha'f-pas' eight, ennyhow. Doan' dar' speak ob it fer yo' life."

"Yes," Nina said, turning the conversation suddenly, with wonderful self-control, as one of the other women came up.

When Nina passed on to her work, leaving the two alone, Lola, with a strengthening of her resolution, told the story in a few graphic words, and gained the woman's consent with little persuasion.

"Et's better ter be shot than ter slav' an' slav' fer nothin'," she said, stolidly. "Yes, I go wid yo', Lola. Yo' 's kin' ter ask, w'en yo' might 'a' gone wid less trouble by yo'se'f."

Lola smiled gravely.

"Et would al'ays a stuck in my min' an' spoiled my life ef I 'd gon' 'thout tellin' yo' an' givin' yo' a chance," she said. "I'se mighty glad yo' 's made up yo' min' dis way, Mississippi."

"Et'd be bigger fool'n me ter gib et de go-by," Mississippi said, bitterly. "Et's all well 'nough fer dem as wants ter wait fer Mr. Linkum ter git 'em free, fer git 'em free he will, but ef we's got a chance ter git 'way now, we's powerfu' big fools as wants ter stay."

"I ain't feared o' yo' backin' out," Lola said, laughing softly. "I hop' de odders'll on'y be reddy."

"W'at odders?" asked Mississippi. "I tho't yo' tole me yo' tell no one 'bout et fer fear o' gettin' cotched, fer yo' kno' ef dey cotch us dey shoot us like a passel o' dawgs. Dey had dere eye on us long time, an' we'd be got outen de way powerfu' sudden ef we is cotched, Lola. Dey nebber 'low us ter git 'way ef dey kin help et."

"I tole yo' dere odders goin'," Lola said, quietly.

"Dars ten ob dem side ourse'ves." She said nothing about Nina. She must be sure of the woman before she implicated others in her plot.

"Well," Mississippi said, coolly, "I ain' got nothin' 'gainst odders goin'. Ef dey is goin' 'long, let 'em; I ain't got nothin' ter say 'bout that; an' ef I'se goin I'se goin'; dey can't keep me frum gittin' my freedum ef I'se willin' ter fight fer et. Ise ain' got no quest'ns ter ask. Yo' 's goin' an' I'se goin', let de odders be whomever dey is. 'Tain' none o' my business, chile. Ise go fas' 'nough."

She started down the hall lest they be seen together, and rouse suspicion; but she suddenly turned back to where Lola stood at the window, her heart full of thankfulness that so far she need fear no harm from betrayal.

"Ef I wus yo', chile," she said, very low, glancing around over her shoulder to see that no one else could hear, "I'd be keerfu' how I tole or let Cl'issa hear ob et. She ain' so good friend as she wouldn't tell ob us jes' fer spitefulness. She ain' too good fer it, I tell yo'."

Lola's own mind was unsettled about Clarissa, and Mississippi's words sent a chill to her heart, though her purpose was strong as ever to give her a chance with them. But it was not till toward night that the oppotunity came to her to tell the woman. They were walking together down to the quarters, and there was no danger of listeners. For an instant the girl's heart went up in prayer that no harm should come to her or her friends through the words she would utter; then very quietly and concisely she told her of their plan of escape, and waited with her heart in her mouth for the answer that would mean life or death to them; for if the woman re-

fused to go with them she would of course expose them, and the consequences would be death.

For a moment she made no reply, but there was an ominous twitching of the hard mouth and a gleam in the cold eyes that boded ill for her cause.

A pallor was stealing over Lola's face, but she controlled herself by a strong effort, and walked on with her companion in silence. Finally the woman spoke—it seemed ages to Lola waiting—and her voice was cold as steel.

"I ain't sech a fool as ter go," she said, scornfully. "No; I ain't a-goin', Lola Richy."

A hand of ice closed around Lola's heart, a wild horror seized upon her. The end must come, then, in this way. Death was to close the scene. Only one night of life, and then—for, of course, the woman would disclose the secret. She had never been friendly to them, and now she would have her revenge.

With a wild prayer unuttered, and her lips so parched she could scarcely control them, she turned to her companion for one last appeal, an appeal not only for herself, but for the lives of her friends, though she gave no hint of this. It was for her life she would have spoken, and left the others free, but when she turned the woman was gone, and she did not see her again that night.

There was little sleep for Lola. The thoughts crowded upon her swift as lightning, deadly as the lightning in their intensity. That she must die—die on the morrow as only a dog would die. Shot down in her health and strength and the first flush of her life. And freedom had been so near it seemed to her that she must go on. In a tumult of terror, and prayer, and crying against her fate, the greater

part of the night was passed, but as morning dawned, the terror and crying ceased, and she grew quiet from the very depth of fear.

If she had done as her lover wished; if she had kept her own counsel, and gone alone with him and his friends, or if she had told only the two whom she felt so certain of, this terrible thing would not have happened to her and now to the other two, for, of course, all would be examined, and Nina, for one, she knew, would not lie to save herself, and confession of the truth would mean death. Yet she could not have gone—she knew she could not have gone and left them without a chance. No; she said it to herself even then, and somehow it gave her courage—she could not have gone without an effort for them also; she could not have stolen away to her happiness, and left them bound.

Die? Ay, she could die if she must, she need be no coward, though life was sweet to her, though life must be sweet in spite of its sorrows.

Strange, she said to herself, smiling with an odd feeling that it was of some one else she was thinking, for some one else she was deciding—strange what a hold life had on one in spite of the deadly struggle and bitterness. Beyond the "Valley of the Shadows" lay peace, and yet she clung with such pathetic tenacity to the hill difficulty of life, with the cruel burdens and the bitter lash of bondage—clung to it, and life that was so sweet with a sweetness that crowded down the bitter.

If death must come—well, death must come to all, but here on the threshold of life and only because she would be free, as God intended all men should be, and because she would help her comrades to a share of the happiness she hoped for.

Her face was set like stone as she arose and dressed. Day was creeping into her room in a dull gray light; it would be a stormy day, she knew; and she smiled still in that stony fashion, thinking how her life set in with the day—her life to end stormily in death.

And how sorry her lover would be, she said to herself—how very sorry he would be when he knew she was dead—dead in the warm flush of her life, with the death of a dog to stain her memory. But he would not blame her—yes, she was quite, quite sure he would not blame her for this that she had done. She had disobeyed his command, and he was not one to take such disobedience lightly, he had the fiery blood of his Spanish father in his veins, and he would not brook the crossing of his will; still she knew he would only be very, very sorry she was dead.

The smile seemed to have frozen on her lips; it was set and terrible in its apathy. She seemed to have no feeling, to have gone out of herself, and thought pityingly of herself as of one she knew and could not help.

It was very sad, she said, a young life shut out from the light of day and the throb and the passion of love by the cold touch of a bullet. And how would it feel when it should strike, and would she die at once or linger in an agony, as so many did—as so many of the soldiers were doing? Poor girl, poor girl! And she must stand aside and let it go on—this strange, sad ending of a life.

She was sorry, very sorry, and what would the lover say—the lover whose name had somehow slipped her memory, but who was very tender with her and very generous to come back for her when

he might have been free from the South by then. He was a kind lover, very kind, and he would be sorry, so sorry she was dead. She felt the close touch of his hand on her arm, and looked up slowly with a vague sense that she would like to see what he looked like—this lover, who was so kind—and found no one there, no one in all the terrible room but this strange, still woman, who would be dead by to-morrow. Her heart must be dead, she thought, for she had no special feeling save an unmoved sorrow for the girl who was to die so soon, and she so young and blameless, save a wish to help her sister women, one of whom would betray her.

She knelt down to pray, and then looked up out of the tiny window close under the roof, and wondered —and the smile was still on her face—why she was down there? She didn't know how to pray; she wasn't a child any more, and only children prayed. A cold, dead woman like her couldn't pray; she had no feeling, and one couldn't pray without that. Oh, yes, there was a God—she was quite sure there was a God, but she couldn't just place Him. He was a terrible Being miles and miles away from her, whom she could not reach if she tried, and why should she try when she was dead? Dead people did not pray; they were either with God or away from Him, and she was sure she was not with Him. No, she was not dead either; but she was turning into stone, and would be dead before to-morrow. The poor girl! It was too bad, and she so young.

But she had prayed. Oh, yes, she had prayed. She remembered now that she had prayed all the night through to this God miles and miles away, and He hadn't heard her, and she would soon be dead. She had prayed for life and her lover, or that

she might welcome death when it came, and she was only turning to stone before they shot her, before the cold lead——

She started and shivered, the set smile slowly faded from her lips, and her teeth began to chatter. After all, she wasn't dead, only it was so cold turning to stone. It was so sad. A poor young thing on the brink of death, and life was so warm, so beautiful and full of love.

The poor girl, she said, and she looked pityingly down on the cold hands still clasped in prayer; and she had done nothing—nothing; she was only trying to be free, to help others to be free. That wasn't a crime, surely that wasn't a crime, and yet, poor girl, she must die for it. How was it right for one to die so when one had committed no crime? Was it a just God who allowed a man, because he was white, to take at will the life of a servant who had always been faithful, whose only fault—if fault it was—was a desire for freedom? Was it a just God who allowed this to go on? But, then, what had she to do with God? She, who was turning to stone, and would so soon be dead?

A sudden revulsion of feeling swept over her; she was trembling, shivering with excitement and terror; she lifted her two clasped hands above her head, her lifted eyes tearless and burning.

"Lawd!" she cried, in a tense whisper that shook her with dread. "Lawd, ef yo' is pitifu' an' o' tender murssy, es Mr. Johnsing tells us, doan' let et happ'n, doan' let et happ'n. Et's cruel, Lawd, et cayn't be right. The chile es so young an' ain' done no harm. Save her, Lawd, ef yo' 's pitifu'."

Then, with a wild sob struggling in her throat and

strangling her, she fell forward upon the bed, clutching the clothing in her trembling hands.

How could she die, how could she die, how could she die? It was dreadful, dreadful, dreadful! But the Lord would help her—yes, the Lord would help her. Didn't Mr. Johnson, the preacher, tell them that the Lord was exceeding pitiful and of tender mercy?

* * * * * * *

Clarissa stopped her as she was entering the kitchen, and said shortly, no softening of her face or voice:

"I'se goin', Lola. Ise may's well git free es ther res' ob yo."

And Lola caught hold of the siding of the door to steady herself in the first great wave of thankfulness and hope.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### FUGITIVES.

Night had settled down in a drizzle of mist and a low soughing of the wind through the trees.

"Et's de chang' ob de moon," the plantation negroes said, for to them the change of the moon meant change of weather as well. "Et's goin' ter be a dirty night, sho'."

And a dirty night it was, dark, with the ghostly glimmer of the camp-fire in the distance flickering and flaring now and then in the rising and falling of the wind, but a night that gladdened the heart of Jim Brown, for who would hear distinctly their stealthy tread through the corn and rushes down the river, or notice so well the muffled ripples fol-

lowing the oars of their boat? Ay, it was a night that would take them within its shadows, and shield them with its mist and wailing wind voices.

Jim was standing close in under Lola's window, trying to still the beating of his heart that he might better listen, almost fearful of the consequences as he struck the stone wall of the house sharply with his stick, that he carried for self defense as well as support; but the wind wailed and swung the creaking boughs of the trees through the mist, and deadened the sound of his stroke into a sharp brushing of a bough against the house, and though the house was still, no one caught the suspicious sound.

He waited breathlessly for what would follow. If Lola should not hear, or if she, too, mistook the noise, what could be done? Or if she were not ready, or thought they were not going because of the darkness, or if she had been discovered——

He dared go no further in his thoughts; the consequences of discovery would be so terrible he could not bring himself to think of that, and he was pretty positive she loved him well enough not to give him up at the last. She was no coward, he knew; she would dare a regiment of soldiers, if need be, without flinching; still, waiting there in the night, with the ghostly darkness around him, and the silence that is full of sound, with the chance at any moment of being detected, many thoughts would come crowding in upon him, robbing him of his peace of mind.

There was no sign nor sound at the window above, and Lola should have recognized his presence in some way. He had been waiting some time, and was growing decidedly impatient; it was very unkind of Lola, to say the least; was she not his sweet-

heart, soon to be his wife, and ought she not to do as he wished, ought she not to try to please him and not willfully expose him to danger? She was showing herself very thoughtless and careless of his comfort or danger, and yet until then he had always thought her so tender hearted.

A misty gust of wind swirled round the corner of the house, whirled round and round him a moment, and then died down, and as he glanced up, after brushing his hat back from his face, he was startled to see four shadowy figures, evidently men, beside him, as though blown there with the wind and the mist.

For a moment he dared not move; perhaps they did not notice him, and he might by silence evade them; but a low, soft voice calling his name reassured him, and grasping the girl's round arm hidden beneath a man's rough coat, he whispered like a breath of the wind:

"Lola! Who yo' brought wid yo'? Ef yo' giv' us 'way, I'll——"

The girl laughed noiselessly, though in the darkness he could not see the pallor in her face at the wound to her love.

"We's reddy, Jim," she said. "Hadn't wes bes' git ter safety 'fore goin' inter details? Et's all right; ain' that 'nough?"

She lifted up her face to him in the darkness, and she could feel his breath against her cheek as he stooped to her, whispering in sudden passion:

"Forgiv' me, my darlin'—my brave darlin'!"

"Cum," she said, abruptly. "Doan' be foolin', Jim. Et's time we wur goin' ef we's ter git off safe. These is my frien's, an' they's goin' 'long."

"I'se glad yo' 's sens'ble an' w'ar clothes I'se tole

yo' ter," he said presently. "Nobuddy'd tak' yo' fer nothin' but a lot o' men," and he, too, laughed noiselessly. "Why dedn't yo' cum befo', Lola?"

"We's come right down's soon as we heard yo'," Lola said, still in the strange, weird whisper that ran in with the sound of the wind, though audible to her companion. "We hed ter cum slow, Jim, an' caut'ous fer fear they's watching us. Dey's had dar eyes on us fer some time, an' we cum car'ful—special car'fu' fer dat."

"They's waitin' fer us," Jim said presently, taking the girl's small bundle, which she explained contained all the food she could get without rousing suspicion, as they started across the wide old garden like formless shadows. "Keep still, an' do as yo' see me do. De sojers is near us, an' wes ain' goin' ter git cotched ef wes kin help et."

Down through the garden, brushing under the low hung trees, bringing down a misty shower upon their shoulders, creeping through the thick hedge that fenced in the lawn from the field, and so, stealthily, silently, slowly they made their way, every sudden sigh of the wind, every sharp touch of the mist thrilling them with terror and a deadly sickness lest they be discovered.

A dog bayed back in the kennels, and an icy chill took hold of their hearts. The blood-hounds! Were they loosening them? Were they on their track so soon? But the mournful cry died away; the night was still again, and the fugitives crept on with bated breath. Crack-crackle, crunch, crunch. It was startlingly loud. Jim dropped like a noiseless shadow flat on his face, and those behind him followed his example. They were in a corn-field, and the stalks, bent on the ground by the wind, broke

under their weight as they crept along. It was on the very edge of the camp; a sentinel was pacing back and forth at one side of the field; he stopped instantly on hearing the warning sound. He stood with rifle ready, and listened; nothing. He peered here and there and everywhere in the darkness that the flickering camp-fire only made more dense; nothing. The wind sighed and sobbed out from the trees, and trembled among the ribbons of the corn, and passed him, brushing his face and hair like a ghostly thing; the mist hung lower through the tree-boughs, and fell around the corn like a veil. Nothing! He resumed his march, ever and anon glancing back at the field as he passed out of earshot, as though not convinced that all was right.

The fugitives crouched down among the corn, listening, listening, waiting, not daring to move lest at any moment a hand be laid upon them in the darkness. Then silence again, andthe man arose slowly on his hands and peered out toward the camp through the waving corn-ribbons. The sentinel was moving slowly away, the distant flash of the fire touching the steel of his rifle into a gleaming streak of light. Jim drew himself up to his knees, still with his face toward the camp, and once more took up the stealthy march on his hands and knees, followed by those behind, feeling carefully for the dry stalks, and putting them to one side; silently, noiselessly creeping down to the reeds and the river. Crunch, crunch; crackle, crackle, crus-s-sh!

The sentinel was once more pacing along beside the field, and again he paused to listen. Dead silence, save for the stirring of the wind now and then. He moved a few steps nearer and stopped, his head bent forward, peering out ahead of him with an

alertness that filled the crouching watchers with terror.

Nearer yet; his foot was almost upon them, almost touched Jim's silent figure. The wind sighed and sobbed and rustled the corn, dying away in the darkness. Nothing more. He turned aside, unmindful of the hearts throbbing in muffled agony of fear at his very feet. Listening, looking, he retraced his steps, conscious that something was wrong, dissatisfied with himself that he was unable to discover it.

As he again passed out of earshot the crouching figures lifted themselves, controlling their trembling by a mighty effort, and crept on, and on, and on, so slowly, so stealthily, that they seemed part of the darkness.

On the edge of the corn-field at last, almost down in the long river reeds that lifted themselves so high some distance back of the bank. Patience one moment and all would be well. They held their breath for very terror; they scarcely dared move lest some mishap would befall them. Two, three, four of them were out and down in the sweeping, swinging grasses that rustled softly, and waved under their feet, for they could stand erect now, but gave no sound. The boat was waiting down in the reeds, hidden close in to the bank, and if only they could reach it in safety.

A more startling, louder crash than the others, and Mississippi, who came last, fell to the ground, tripped by the long, tangled stalks of the corn at the edge.

A breathless, death-like silence, a cowering of the dark forms in the swaying grass, a moment's waiting that seemed like an eternity of years. The sen-

tinel passed quietly out of earshot on his beat, and the danger was passed.

"Linkum" was the password to the waiting boat, and one by one they stepped down from the bank and into the float, and pushed off from shore. The oars were muffled by their jackets, which were taken off for the purpose, and silently they glided down the river with the wind against the tide that was flowing slowly in.

Now and then a sudden noise on the bank would bring the oars to rest, and they would listen trembling and exhausted until the after silence proved the danger past. Midnight passed, the wee, small hours of the morning were rising over the world. Daylight was coming, and with it would come danger, unless they could hasten and gain the Federal camp before it reached them.

Sounds near and startling began to disturb the silence, and made the fugitives fear at every step they gained lest some one hidden in the thickets should discover them and they should be lost. The sharp crack of a rifle woke the low echoes; the cry of some night bird answered the ringing report; the ripple of the water against the boat sounded like the roar of cannon to the excited ears of the runaways.

But they passed down the river on their way to Fortress Monroe, where they hoped to be helped on their way, for, like most of the slaves shut on the plantations, they knew absolutely nothing about the way to travel nor how to find the way. By and by the sounds on shore came closer; they seemed to draw nearer the shore and drift with the wind and the tide that had turned, and was bearing them slowly on their way. A sentry was pacing up and down, they could almost touch him as he passed

along the shore; the rattle of a rifle as he set it down or shifted it from one shoulder to the other; the sharp challenge to some one passing into camp, or only the tramp, tramp, tramp of the man as he passed to and fro, now into the shadows of the thicket, now out in the red light of the fire.

Every sound struck on the ears of the listeners with dread; what if their oars be heard or their boat seen as they glided past, silent, breathless, not daring to move, their eyes searching the darkness around them. Down, down the river, not one of them closing their eyes in sleep in spite of fatigue, for what was fatigue, or what was the loss of sleep compared to the chance they ran of being captured if they left the watch?

Then up from the darkness that was slowly breaking loomed a vessel above their heads. For an instant they thought it was running them down, and then the truth dawned upon them. It was a Confederate gunboat anchored off shore, and to be captured by them would mean death, or worse. But how were they to pass without discovery? Against the gray line of the breaking day they could make out the moving figures of the watch on deck, and could hear the rattle of chains now and then, or a word of command. To row past them would be impossible, the sound of the oars, muffled though they were, would almost surely be detected; they must trust to the wind and tide to drift them past.

So they shipped their oars, and sat waiting with fearful hearts and faces drawn with terror. How slow they went. Sometimes it seemed as though they did not move, as though the great black gunner was standing guard over them, so that they could not go on; but the tide drifted out and the wind

blew down, and the boat drifted, drifted, drifted, rocking like a child's plaything on the waves, now turned to the left, now swung to the right by a sudden sweep of the tide, and then——

Crus-s-sh, grate-grate!

They had struck a sand bar or a pebbly bank out in the water, and they dared not venture to push the boat off, for the noise would attract attention, and the gunboat was so near they could almost see the flashing of the sentinel's arms. Could it be that they had escaped so far only to fall into the hands of the Confederacy after all? Could the God who had kept them so far have deserted them at this time of need? Was the end to be death after all?

Jim leaned forward, and laid his hand over Lola's as she sat quite steady and still, the other women around her in an ecstasy of terror.

"Dere ain' nothin' we kin do, honey," he said, his lips against her ear. "De end ob it es ter be de'th; 'tain't no use a-tryin'. But I sw'ar," his hand closed over hers till she winced with the pain, "I sw'ar yo' doan' fall inter dere han's. No, sah! We kin use dis ef de wuss do cum!"

She felt the touch of cold steel against her throat and a long, half sobbing shiver ran through her. It was to be death after all, though she had hoped God heard her prayer. God, up in His high heaven, and she a fugitive slave! Then the calm of utter despair again fell upon her, and she lifted her face bravely to his.

"De good Lawd has kep' us so far, Jim," she said, "let us jes' trus' Him de res' ob de way. We all lie right down in de bottom ob de boat an' pray de Lawd ter help us de res' ob de way. 'Tain' no use

o' givin' up w'en we's so fur, an' may git de res' ob de way, ef we's on'y hab faith."

Terror was so upon them that they obeyed her mechanically, though few of them could find words for prayer. But Lola prayed—how she did pray! The struggle in the dark of the previous night for her own life was nothing to the wild pleading she sent up for them all. And lo! a sudden gust of wind, a current of the tide swept in to the bar, and softly, gently, as though even the wind and tide were with them, the boat was lifted and drifted free, and drawn once more out into the current, gliding like a bit of the night on its bosom up to, and close under, and past the Confederate gunboat and down the river away—away!

For a while none of them stirred; the joy on the heels of terror left them stunned and speechless; then they arose and took up the oars.

It was broad daylight when they once more found themselves facing a camp on the shore, with a gunboat in the river, and knew that they were observed. There was a stir on deck and on shore, and a boat was sent out to capture them, but the broad light fell on the uniforms of blue, and they knew that they were saved. They raised a white handkerchief as a truce, for it was evident the soldiers thought them hostile from the manner of their approach, and welcomed the soldiers gladly.

* * * * * * *

"My child," said the general, when Lola had finished her story, "I shall advise you as I would if you were my daughter. You say you and the young man are to be married. Where and when?"

"I doan' know," replied the girl, softly, with bent

head; "he sed w'en we git ter a place w'ere we kin fin' a min'ster."

"Well," was the kindly answer, for the general's heart was warm, and this girl in her innocence touched him strangely, "you have already come so far with him in company with your friends, but as we must hold all excepting yourself and the man as contrabands, you will have to continue the rest of your journey alone; you and he are free, and can go, but if you were my daughter I would wish you safely married first; you will find no better place than this, and the chaplain shall marry you to-night, and you shall start at once for the North in company with one of our men, who goes at midnight. Will you be ready, child?"

"But," and the red streamed under the dark of her cheek, "I'se got nothin' ter w'ar, gen'ral. I'se got nothin' but dese clothes, an' dey isn't fit ter git marr'ed in. Et's on'y a' ole dress put on over de men clothes I had on, as de res' ob us did. I cayn't git marr'ed in dese."

"I know," he said, and the kindly face was stirred with a smile. "I know how you feel, Lola; all girls feel so, I suppose, but it is the best you can do. The ceremony will be at eight. Be ready."

And she accepted his command gravely, lifting her head with a half proud gesture.

"My mammy'd wish et, I'm sho'," she said, frankly; "but Ise cayn't b'ar ter git marr'ed in dese t'ings."

They were married that night at the fort, and the officers, with their wives, and the privates, made a sort of gala time of it, it was such an original entertainment, and there was the wedding dinner and dancing at the end of it, and as the night grew late,

and the scene must close, one of the soldiers, a young fellow with sunny curls over his head, and eyes blue as the heavens, and a smile that deepened in his eyes like a lake when the wind stirs it, passed his hat among the company with a few remarks about wedding gifts being late, and when he emptied the contents in the lap of the dark little bride, she found herself the possessor of over a hundred dollars, and they had started without a cent. And many a "God speed" followed them as they started out to find their new life together up North, where all are free.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### WAITING WITH FOLDED HANDS.

Mrs. Courtland remained so long in that state of semi-insensibility, roused now and then into fits of delirium, that the doctors looked more and more serious over the case than they had at first appeared, but stating their fears to no one but the nurse. The blow had been so sudden and severe, at a time when her general health was too nervous from worry and anxiety regarding her boys, that the effect was more serious than it otherwise would have been. The squire guessed of their anxiety, and he was daily growing to expect the worst when he left the Hall for the city, the day passing on leaden wings, momentarily expecting, he scarcely knew what, of bad news, though he also kept the fact from Nan, who, in her own brave way, was fighting her own battles alone, that her father should not have added burdens on his daily more stooping shoulders, or more worry in his already too anxious state. She had grown into the habit of talking with him about the

war, and the dangers threatening the city at any moment, when there should be an uprising if the population resented too strongly their being drafted into the ranks against their will—the rough rabble that had no pride of country, being mostly but aliens therein, and who cared for nothing but the low life of inactivity, living from hand to mouth, glad of a meal if it could be had, sleeping off the pangs of hunger if it was unattainable, railing against fate that had given some so much more than others, in their blind fashion. She drew her father almost unconsciously to talk of these things, determined to help fight the home battles, be they ever so small, compared to the terrible struggles going on in the fields where the men were dying day by day for the good of their fellow creatures. It was almost an ignominious battle, she said to herself many a time, thinking over the simple little words of comfort she could utter to relieve the overwrought nerves of the man depending upon her for comfort, now that the dearest woman to him was lying unconscious of his thought of her, and his boys, and the sweet girl, his sole comforter, and the throes of agony going on in the heart of his country. It was nothing that she was doing compared with the grand work Helen's white fingers were even now doing for the suffering soldiers brought to her care, suffering, dying, cheered by the grave face they must love for its purity and nobleness, bending, as Nan knew it would bend, above some other poor lad dying as that lad died, whose death she had never forgotten, described as it had been by Helen during their talks together, ere she left to join in the ranks of nurses so much needed, so hard to fill in spite of the willingness of the women to do their share for their

country, as their men were doing. She envied Helen so many times when the days passed like crawling things, and there was nothing for her to do but watch the papers for any item of news regarding the boys—the boys, and one other of whom she thought, with quickened heart-beats, and warmer color in the tender face under its fluffy golden hair. He was brave, she knew, he could be nothing else than brave; it was his heart and soul and honor, and he would fight in the very midst of the worst perils, cheering on his men by his own bravery. The men must be cheered, he had told her so many times, and she knew he was the man to cheer them, though his own life might be at its end. The mere thought of this swept the sweet color from her face, leaving only the pathetic effort at bravery that made it almost impossible for one loving her to see.

"The devils are growing daily more desperate," the squire said, one evening, in speaking of the rabbles in the city. "There is a subdued murmur of threat and vengeance in the air that bodes no good to the city. But there are men on the watch for some such outbreak, and they will have the mob in their power almost before it is born, when the time comes. You need have no fear for me, little girl. Why should they harm me?"

He laughed that she might laugh, as she so many times had done for him, but there was no answering parting of her sweet, quivering mouth, as her eyes searched his face for any evidence of more harm than he had told her.

She was beginning to understand how desperate the men were who were forced into the fight against their will, and what a set of men they were also, and how thoroughly capable of wreaking their ven-

geance upon no matter how many innocent heads in order to reach those they held responsible for their drafting. She knew there was much more than her father told her, for now she was watching the papers, not only for news of the armies, but for all the home news she could find, the daily rising element of hatred felt by the lower classes for the laws that sent them unwilling fighters into the ranks, and their efforts, so far unsuccessful, of attempts to break the rules by brute force, and free the men from the hard lines they were forced into. She knew how the city was watching for the final outbreak that would have to come and be quelled before order could in any sense be established again, and she knew of how the very heart of the city was ready for the worst, but with the defenses somewhat weakened by the drain of the war and the need of men elsewhere, the commanders outside never dreaming of what was threatening the home walls.

"Are you sure you are very careful, papa?" Nan asked presently, smoothing caressingly the hand over one of her hands on her father's knee. The lamp-light was very soft over her uplifted face, and the curls tossed by her reckless fingers in her perplexity. "You are sure you do your very best to keep posted on these threatened outbreaks? You are where you might not know of them until you were shut off and unable to help defend the city, or save your own life."

"You're not to worry about me, Nan," her father said, quietly, but with an authority she had seldom heard during the last few years.

The earnestness only deepened in her face as she said, quite as gravely as he had spoken:

"How can I help worrying, papa? Here you are

off every day in the midst of dangers as great, if not so apparent, as any of the army, with mamma so ill, up stairs, away from us, and the dear boys out fighting for us. But, oh," she added, brightly, with a swift change of manner, seeing the shadow falling upon her father's face, "I am so proud of my dear old papa and my big brave brothers. It is good to be a man and go to battle, instead of just a woman shut in at home, unable even to do the least thing to help on the struggle that means life or death to us as well as you men. It is so good even to be as Helen is——"

She paused and smoothed still more softly the hand upon her own. She had not intended to let her heart's desire run away with her tongue in this manner, for she had kept any word of her inner wish to be in the worst of the fighting, if only as nurse, from her father's ears, and now here she had almost told him what she so longed to do.

"But, after all, there's nothing so sweet as to be at home with those one loves, is there, papa?"

Her brave smile did not blind him in the slightest degree. His own face darkened, and he only let his hand lie loosely in her clasp, as his eyes looked past her out into the fields where women were doing their best, as well as the men, for the victory of the country and of right. He had long known this secret wish of his daughter to go with her friend into the hospitals, or in the field, to nurse the wounded and dying of those who had fought the good fight for their country and their God, but he had kept the knowledge to himself, for he dared not let her go when the sweet woman up in the quiet room might pass from them at any moment, and he could not have her daughter from the house when she

might be needed—must be needed at such a time. If her mother recovered—and it was almost a consecration—he would not only cease to hinder, but would help his daughter to carry out this desire of her heart and go to the care of her brother-men, or the assistance of her sister-women, under the shield of her friends' care, for he had the most perfect confidence in Helen's ability not only to care for herself and her wounded soldiers, but to keep out of harm's way at all times. Helen was older than Nan, and knew more of the world and its ways, and he could willingly—almost—let Nan go. Almost, for Nan was his greatest help and comfort, with her cheery face and brave voice giving him the words of encouragement he so needed in this trying time. Dear little Nan, with her golden hair a-flutter, and the color coming and going in the tender, girlish face.

Involuntarily he stooped suddenly and took the girl's face between his hands, lifting it that he might the better search it for tenderness and its most hidden desires.

"My little daughter has to take the place of mother and brothers now to the old man," he said, rather huskily, letting the sweet face go, and leaning tiredly back in the chair. "It's a trying world anyway, Nan."

"But, after all, it's a pretty world, papa," Nan said, with her old clear laugh, that rang tenderly upon his weary heart. "It's a pretty, nice, good old world, Papa Courtland, if we only know well enough how to appreciate it. And it'll not be long that your Nan 'll have to take all those places for you, for mother will be with us very soon now, I am so sure, and the dear, noisy, big boys will be here to

make the old Hall the same rackety place it used to be. I have perfect faith in my belief, papa dearest. So you are to cheer up and let no ugly care sit like the black dog on your shoulder—your dear big, broad shoulders."

She jumped up, and going behind him, placed her two white arms about his neck, leaning over to peer inquisitively into his grave face, her own quite merry and happy, though her heart was aching—ah, who could ever know how her heart was aching for him and her own self. She longed so at that moment for some one to comfort her as she was trying to comfort her father—some one, she did not say whom, but she knew—she and her heart knew full well.

"It's so good to have you, anyway, papa," she said, her face suddenly turned into shadow that the tears in her eyes should not be seen. "It's so good to have you, and I am, oh, so sure we will have mother and the boys with us again soon; the war must be nearly over." But in her heart she knew the war was not nearly over, and that the hardest of the struggle was still to come.

"And still there's no trace of the thieves," Nan said presently, to give a different current to their thought, for she herself could not much longer have borne up under this strain upon her heart. She came around once more and sat down at the squire's feet, resting her arms upon his knees, as was her favorite attitude during these sadly sweet moments of theirs. "It seems almost useless to ask after them, there being so little hope of ever capturing them."

"Very little hope of ever getting within their reach," her father said, gravely. "They took good

care to shield themselves before they attempted such an outrage."

"But that leader looked capable of doing almost anything," Nan said, laughing nervously at remembrance of the flashing black eyes behind the mask. "I wouldn't care to meet him again, papa."

"It isn't likely you will ever meet him again," her father said. "Such men as he are careful not to place themselves in the way of any one who might recognize them. It is more such men as that whom we have to fear than the double ranks of the foe on the field."

"But, after all," Nan said, her thoughts taking a different turn, "I would trust almost any of those Confederate soldiers, or generals, or captains, any day sooner than I would trust Howard Blake, and I'm not afraid to say it."

"Hush, Nan!" the squire said, almost sharply. "Be careful how you speak of that man. He has me in his power, so far as that money goes. If he chose, he can come down upon me for the amount at any time, and I must pay it. I have no stand against him, and he would carry it out to the bitter end if we should thwart his wishes——"

Nan interrupted him, her face hardening strangely.

"What do you mean, papa? How are we to thwart any wish of his? Has he made any villainous plans that we are in danger of running against? What, pray, have we to fear from such a man as he? Too cowardly to enter the army when his country needs every man it can have, too selfish to accept, as any gentleman would, the loss that was his own, and not yours, too ungentlemanly to be honest and upright in his life or his words—I hate the

man, papa, and I would do almost anything to prove it to him."

She looked capable of it. Her face was flushed, and her eyes flashing with the same spirit with which she met the daring burglar in her room that night that brought the shadow of death so close upon their home life. Her hands were clenched as though she would like to try her woman's strength against the strength of the world.

Her father smiled involuntarily. He was as proud of this daughter of his as though he had no sons. She had a good deal of his spirit, too—old, brave, war-like spirit—and he admired her for it. She had plenty of womanly sweetness to counterbalance it, and could well afford such a flashing spirit. She was a Courtland to the core, but with her mother's gentleness and tenderness that made her so lovable.

"I haven't a doubt you'd like to prove it to him this minute, Nan, little girl," he said. "He isn't the man we would desire for a friend, or to be under such obligation as we are——"

"We're under no obligation," protested Miss Nan, flashing her big blue eyes upon her father with renewed warlike tendencies. "We're under not a speck of obligation to Howard Blake, papa. I'd die rather than be, anyway, and I know we are not. As to that money. it wasn't your fault that he lost it—I'm sure you lost nearly as much more as he—and I'll not have you feeling so. You're as high above him as it is possible for a man to be."

"I told you you could not comprehend how we men feel in such a matter, my dear Nan."

The squire was growing restless. He would not for the world tell his daughter of the proposal the

same man had made him for her hand as a motive for dropping the matter of the money, a refusal from her being followed by the immediate claim for the full amount. He could not face her and even think of it. He moved wearily in the chair, and turned his head that the shadows should lie darkly around him.

But Nan was as quick to guess he was troubled as though he had told her his innermost thoughts. She stooped suddenly, and taking his head in her hands, turned his face so that the full gas-light fell upon it. Then she searched every feature steadily for a moment in utter silence.

"Papa," she said, solemnly, then, her flashing eyes upon his, though her lips were trying to soften her anger by smiling, "papa, I would have nothing to do with Howard Blake more than merely to acknowledge his presence—no, not even for you, were that necessary. I do honestly hate him more than I can tell, or than you can even guess, knowing him as well as you do. I hate him so thoroughly that I would see him die at my feet without lifting my hand to save him, were that possible. I hate him so that I feel as though a snake were in my presence when he is near. I know he is not a good man, or an honorable man, not even a man at all, as we judge of men. He may have money—I do not doubt that, he is too contemptibly mean not to have money—but if he were rolling in gold I would still put as much distance between us as is possible. There, Papa Courtland," she laughed, but it was a quivering laugh, "now you know how much I hate and detest your Mr. Blake."

She did not say that she knew full well that he desired her hand in payment for the money, as he re-

cognized fully his utter inability to lay claim to it on any other grounds, but she knew it as thoroughly as though her father had put it in just so many words, and her father knew she did.

"He should never have my brave, patriotic little woman," he said, laughing softly, as he took her two cold hands in his, and drew her down upon his knee. "He is not worthy to enter the room with you, and never should he lay claim to closer friendship than you give to the merest passing acquaintance."

And Nan knew he would keep to his word.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### HOW HE WORKED HIS PLANS.

Nan knew that her father would keep to his word in regard to Mr. Blake, but she had such a thorough horror and distrust of the man that she would have feared him, were she capable of fear. As it was, she kept constantly on the watch for some underhand work upon his part to draw the financial net more and more tightly about her father, and in such a carefully devised manner as to be quite unseen or undreamed of by him. She knew he would never give over any plan of his without fighting for it, too cowardly though he was to enter the army and fight where fighting was needed. It would be no open warfare. He was not brave enough to openly face a man or woman and state his determination to fight to the death rather than lose his victory. He would follow so closely upon her father's footsteps that he could do nothing of which he was not aware. That the present state of the city demanded care for self preservation he knew, and would

doubtless see that her father did not too well learn the facts of the case. That he was working for the good of the country under the government, she hoped Howard Blake did not know, but she feared that of even that he was in possession. He would hold it, too, over her father's head to use when the time should come. She hoped no one knew her father was endangering his life in this way for the government, for it would be almost as effective as a death blow to let the rabble in the city know he was a spy upon their movements to prepare the city for its struggle when the outbreak should come. She knew that her brothers and friends were laying their lives down, it might be, for their country, but to have her father lay his down at the hand of some one of the brutal roughs of the rabble, should they guess his intention toward them—she could not bear to think. Her father, so tall and grand looking, who would long ere that have made his way to the rank of general had he been permitted to join the army—how could she think of such a thing? But Howard Blake was capable of using any means in his power to gain his end, and should all other plans fall through, or fail in their fulfilling, she had not a doubt he would use this power over her father's life to win her consent. She had not an atom of faith in him, and she was therefore perhaps better prepared to fight him than her father was. She was on her guard. He would have to work with the skill of a general, indeed, if he would blind her watchfulness.

But Howard Blake knew this as well as Nan. He was perfectly aware of her distrust of him; of her positive dislike—he called it by no other name—to him. But she would lose this feeling after a

while, he felt sure. She was like all other women, to be won by hard wooing and patient waiting to overcome her first repulse. He could win her through gold, he was sure, as a last resort. No woman could refuse the good that went with gold. No price was too high in his eyes for winning the girl he had decided should be his. That she was not indifferent to the young captain, who had not long resumed his place in the war, he knew full well. That Captain Travers would win her if he could, he also knew. But in his eyes Nan Courtland was already his. In his heart she would be his, did he but wait long enough to work his plans with sufficient care. He had more than one wire to pull in accomplishing his end, and he would undoubtedly win. If the worst came to the worst he could threaten her father. Well, he hoped honestly that that would not be necessary. He would use no harsh measures if it were possible to do without. He wished his wife to love him, and he knew her well enough to know how she could hate if she chose.

He was on his way down to the Hall to inquire as to Mrs. Courtland's condition, as was his habit. He did not go by the road, as he did usually, but walked down through the fields where the clover was heavy waiting for the scythe. He looked about him with pride as he walked, for there was not another estate in the country in such fine condition as his, since the war had robbed the farms of their workers and the homes of their leaders. He was thinking over all these plans of his as he walked, and looking over his ruddy grain and waiting hay, out to where the sleek cattle roamed; he chuckled to himself, thinking what a frail defense Nan Courtland could make against him should she try. He pushed his

white straw hat back on his head, leaving the broad light to bring into view every feature and characteristic of his face. It was not a true face, but in its way it was handsome. There was an evil light in the wavering black eyes and a sinister curve around the thin lips that denoted a brutal nature. But the skin was purely olive, and brought into better effect the eyes and black curling hair and mustache. He was tall and graceful, too, in appearance, as he walked down through the clover, his hands deep in his pockets, buried in these thoughts. He knew there was many a girl who would say yes to him gladly should he care to lay his fortune at her feet. But it was only Nan Courtland he desired, and it was Nan Courtland who would not have ready the yes he should demand.

She was down in the summer-house among her flowers, and he knew full well she would be there when he took the path through the fields. She was always in the garden in the morning. He paused at the edge of the rose hedge, where the tiny wicket shut off the peering clover, and watched her, unnoticed, for a few minutes.

She was the picture of dainty womanliness as she sat on the doorstep of the house, the morning paper at her feet—read, and no trace of the dread notice she had feared, as she feared every day in taking up the sheet—the warm colors of the summer flowers setting off to full perfection the loose gown she wore of pale blue dotted with white daisies. A ribbon of the blue was about her round throat, and the ends fluttered among the curls that were tangled by the morning breeze all over her graceful head. There was a half smile on the perfect lips, and a happy light in the downcast eyes, shaded by their

silken lashes, as she arranged slowly and carefully the bouquet in her hands.

Standing so, watching her, the man at the wicket almost hated her for this sweetness and grace which he could not win as he would win any other woman. He must work as though for some sacred thing to win her from her home and her soldier lover. She would scorn him, asking her as she sat in the tender light of the morning under the shade of the fragrant summer-house. There would be no smiling, blushing hesitation as she could give if she wished. He knew too well the scornful curve of the red lips so warm with life when she talked with him. He remembered the flash of the eyes that could be so tender if they would. He hated her as he stood there and ground his teeth together with a muttered curse, as he vowed in his heart to win her by any means under the sun—by fair means, if they would win, by foul means, should these fail.

As though she felt the evil influence of his presence, her tender face darkened and she looked up, scarcely knowing what she expected, but conscious of some evil in her path, something not for her good around her.

This also he noted, and there was an answering flash of the hate she felt for him as he met her angry eyes. He bowed and opened the gate as though he had but just come up, his thin lips parting in the smile that sent the girl's blood running icily. He came up to her as though he knew he would be welcome. Women liked men to be masterful, he said inwardly.

"My fair neighbor is busy," he said. His voice was low and almost tender, in its tone, but there was no familiarity in it. She should not have en-

dured that. "This is fitting work for you, Miss Nan. Flowers are your fit companions."

"Oh," she laughed, wickedly. She had not a trace of fear of the man this morning, the world was so sweet to her. If she had chosen she could have shown him a note scribbled on a scrap of paper in her pocket that changed the whole day for her. "If flowers are my fit companions, Mr. Blake, to what class are you to be consigned? Sunflowers?"

She was laughing easily. There was no harshness in her face or voice. He thought what a sweet woman she would be could she but be as friendly toward him as now she was. There was almost a regret in his heart that he could not always inspire her with such kindly feelings in his behalf. He knew full well that she seldom held such pleasant words for him.

He held his hat in his hand and fanned himself with it as he stood leaning against the doorway of the summer-house, towering above her in his strength and energy. She looked up in her merry fashion—nothing could put her out of temper that morning—and shook her sunny head, her lips parted, just showing the pearly teeth, the dimples breaking the smoothness of the warm pink cheeks.

"I wonder that you walked over this morning, Mr. Blake," she said. "It is such a grand morning for a canter. If I had your big chestnut, I'd never have the ambition to walk a single step."

He leaned carelessly against the door-post. His black curls were lifted and swayed by the breeze he raised with the motion of his hat. A more pleasant light came into his eyes as they looked down at the dainty little lady at his feet, her hands filled with the warmly colored flowers.

"At any time when you care for a ride," he said, quietly, as though it were scarcely a favor he was doing, "you are at perfect liberty to use any horse in the stables, I am sure, Miss Nan. You have no idea how breezy it is on the upland slope where the clovers are thickest. You are fond of beauty, and you could appreciate that. If you would paint it some time you would feel amply repaid for any trouble it might be. The clovers simply carry the feeling of breezes in their rosy tops. I am no artist, but I like beauty of that sort."

"Then you do not appreciate my poor garden flowers," she said, sweetly. She lifted her frank, blue eyes to his face without a trace of ill feeling. She was a trifle off her guard, and had forgotten such disagreeable things as any man being willing to commit an act of villainy for her sake. "I care more for my pink roses and carnations and Canterbury bells than I could for the world sown with pink clovers. But they are pretty, Mr. Blake, and some time I may catch your clover slope for a panel. I thank you for the suggestion, and also for your generous offer of the use of your stables. My poor pretty Queen had to be shot, you remember, because she broke her leg last winter, and I cannot bear to put another horse in her place, she was such a noble animal."

"She was a fine creature," he said, never hinting that he knew perfectly well that her horse was not replaced by any other because the squire was under heavy money drain, and she would not press her desire. That she could be generous if she chose, he had plenty of proof. "But if you really care for a trial, the bay mare is the easiest rider. I will have her sent over any time you may desire. How perfect

those bells retain their color, Miss Nan. They are as blue as the heavens, and match the pink of the roses. I trust your mother is improving."

He had said this in different ways every morning of her mother's illness, but never had she heard it with such kindly feeling toward him, and never had she answered him with the gentleness of this morning. She leaned her sunny, curly head against the door-post, and there came a mist into the far away looking eyes as she said, low and softly:

"Mamma is nearly the same, Mr. Blake. I do so miss her about the house. Will she never recover?"

He made no advances of friendliness. He was learning wisdom in this wooing of his neighbor's daughter. If she had known it, she had more cause to fear him that morning than ever before. He had mapped out his manner of action, and would follow it to the end, and the end——

There was a deeper tone of sympathy in his voice as he answered her, but that was all. He did not even allow his eyes to rest on her face—the quivering girlish face raised so earnestly to him.

"You must not lose faith, Miss Nan. Your mother will recover. It was a terrible blow, but she has enough vitality to withstand even that, I am sure. She is too kind a hostess to get on without. Courtesy is such a sweet thing in a woman!"

She felt rebuked somehow, and her old antagonism was coming back. He had been so unlike himself that she had nearly forgotten their unpleasant relations toward each other. He saw the tenderness dying from her face, and straightened himself. He would give her no chance for unpleasant words. He would leave a kindly feeling this once, at least.

"At least I am glad she is no worse, Miss Nan.

I must go on now, as I have to see about the mowing. You may be thankful you are not a man to manage a farm."

She shrugged her round shoulders and lifted her arched brows.

"If I were a man," she said, and he knew from her changed tone that he would have a bitter reply,

"I would not stay for any upland mowing, Mr. Blake. If I were a man I would be in the thickest of the fight, doing my best to hasten the end of this terrible war."

He laughed easily. She should not know that she had moved him in the slightest degree. They were always at drawn swords, those two.

"No doubt you would follow your own road, Miss Nan!" he said, and, lifting his hat, was gone before she could offer further reply.

"I wish he had stayed just long enough for me to have answered that," she said, angrily, looking resentfully after him, all the gentleness gone from her face, idly crushing with one tiny boot the slender string of Canterbury bells that had fallen at her feet.

While striding back through the sweet upland clover Howard Blake ground his teeth in sullen wrath.

"If fair means fail——" he said.

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## CHAPTER X.

### A FEW CHANGES.

Nan was leaning eagerly over the piazza railing, watching for her father. There was a flush on her cheeks and a new light in her eyes. She even hummed softly a snatch of song as she stood there

holding to the railing with both white hands, one of the hounds at her feet, watching her with intelligent eyes. She was a new Nan in her present state of feeling, and even the animal recognized this.

The sun was going down over the hills toward the west; in the east the pale rose was turning to the amber that heralds moonrise. It was rather later than usual for her father, but her heart was wonderfully light, and she did not have a trace of fear that any harm had befallen him. She was impatient for his coming, for she had good news for him, but she was too much occupied with this one thought to even stop to think deeper of his delay.

"I am so glad, so glad mamma is better," she said finally to the dog, stooping to pat his lifted head. "I simply cannot wait for papa to come home that I may tell him the good news, Carlo. It does seem just too good to be true."

She sat down on the wide old steps beside the dog, lifting his head to her lap that she might more easily smooth his shining coat. She pulled his long ears with affectionate tormenting, and laughed when he moved uneasily at a harder pull than before.

"I must torment you, poor old Carlo," she said, "if I can have no one else to talk to. You're a dear, patient fellow, and I'll prove it."

She laughed again gayly, and pulled with renewed vigor the silken ears. She could not be quiet with her suppressed happiness. It was so good to once more see her mother, to hear her voice even so faintly, to know that she recognized her daughter, to know that she had smiled upon her with a trace of her old time sweetness. Again she broke into the gay little snatch of song, her voice sounding strange after its long silence.

"I just simply cannot wait for papa to come that I may tell him!" she said, happily. She slapped the ear nearest her with an affectionate stroke. "You blessed old Carlo, I'm going to keep on telling you until he does come."

There was no keeping down her light heart. Her eyes were brilliant with pleasure. She tossed her head, and the yellow curls went aflutter over her graceful shoulders.

Still there was no sound of wheels along the road turning in at the wide gate. Strain her eyes as she would for the first glimpse of the carriage rolling slowly along behind the lazy horses, she caught no such sight. The dust lay undisturbed along the level road. There was no scattering of the noisy sparrows in the trees at the entrance, roused by the rumbling wheels. They chirped and chattered, and screamed their shrill "cheat, cheat, cheat" to their hearts' content; nothing came to hush their cries or send them from their cool nesting.

By and by the lightness died from the eager face bending above the dog. A small pucker of thought appeared on the smooth brow. An anxious look came into the wide, frank eyes watching the gateway for the first stir of the birds that would herald the approach of any carriage.

"It's strange," she said presently, to the quiet dog. "It's awully strange papa doesn't come. It can't be that what we have dreaded for so long has come just now when I have such good news for him of mamma's condition. It can't be that the dreaded riot——"

She could not bring herself to utter the thought that must bring such terror to any one knowing what animals the men were who would rouse the city

with their uprising. She and her father had gone over the ground so many times, she knew what must of necessity follow such an outbreak. She was perfectly aware of the danger her father was in from day to day, but every day he returned home without the dread thing having happened, and she had almost grown to lose her fear. Now it was upon her in all its terror. She could not sit silently there on the steps, with only the dog for company, with that thought in her mind. She must be up and doing, she must go, she must not be idle. How could she sit there doing absolutely nothing when her father might be in the midst of such peril as even Frank and Charlie and Ned would not have to face, for this rabble would be composed of brutes that would sneak up to one and give the stab in the dark, while the others were men, and would fight as soldiers should. How she wished for her brothers and her friends at that time. Perhaps she had never wished more for them. She arose and descended the steps, the dog following her without her call. He seemed to know something was wrong. He watched her with his large eyes as a friend might. Unconsciously she paused and stroked his head. She must have sympathy in the sore trial that might be upon her. She wondered vaguely what had made her heart so light if there was such sorrow upon her. She wondered if God was as good as she thought as she sat there on the steps, singing her foolish song. What had she to do with love or the hope of love when these terrible things were abroad in the land? What had she to do with the happiness that came to other girls? It seemed to her that her life was sadder than the lives of others.

The tender red mouth drooped with the depth of

her despair; the tender eyes grew wistful with the longing to know, and the dread of knowing, what lay before her in the gathering darkness of the night. Here, with the silence and the peace of the country around her, could it be that in the city not many miles away was the rabble and the riot? Was death doing his work under this quiet heaven? Was there only sorrow for her, and the sparrows so happy in the shadows of the elms? They did not mind her approach, for they were used to the light step and the dainty figure waiting at the gate for the return of the carriage. Maybe they chirped more cheerily and changed their calling to "cheer" instead of the "cheat" she had always heard them utter. She did not know. She was growing so listless and stunned that she could not quite tell what she did hear and see. There was a half uttered prayer in her heart, but it was so broken and disconnected that she could not even place it as she should. She seemed to have lost all power of thought. Only the dog remained at her side as she passed down the drive. He seemed to know that there was trouble for them.

At the gate she paused and sat down on the great rock under the elm at the edge of the gateway. It was cool there and quiet, and she could not hear the muffled sounds of the house. She wanted to be away from all sounds for the present. Only the birds seemed to soothe her, and the knowledge of the dog's faithfulness seemed to touch her. She smiled mechanically, and laid her hand upon his head. He understood and licked it with canine affection.

How long she sat there with the dog's head on her lap, she would never know. Twilight deepened into the pallor of moonrise; the crickets cheeped in the tall grasses at the roadside; the birds in the

branches above her were settled for the night, uttering no sound save now and then an uneasy twitter as they moved in their sleep. Then the moon broke the darkness and rose splendidly above the eastern hills, sending a flood of light along the road to the feet of the girl in the shadow.

One of Mr. Blake's men passed and gave her good-evening. She replied to him, and smiled a wan little smile that only made her face more sad in the half light. There was an apathy about her that the man did not understand. She was usually, even when her mother was at the worst, a cheery woman, and therefore a favorite with every one.

By and by Mr. Blake himself came up from the meadow lot, and paused in wonder. He had been told of her presence there, but she would never know that. If she was down at the gate, she was consequently waiting for her father, for he knew all these habits of hers, and therefore her father could not have arrived. There must be some good reason for his delay, for he had never kept his daughter waiting since this sickness of her mother. And if the thing had happened that he, too, was waiting for in spite of his apparent unconcern in all matters relating to the war, then the net was closing around his victim, and he would gain a firmer hold. He had been waiting for this longer than the girl would have believed.

"You have chosen a lonely place to watch the moon rise, Miss Nan," he said, lightly, crossing to her side, and pausing in spite of a low growl from the dog. "Isn't it rather damp for you? It isn't the sort of place I should expect to find you in."

His words roused her spirit. She would not allow him to know of what she feared. He would perhaps

glory in her father's danger. He would not help her in any case, and she could not bear for him to be with her now.

"I didn't know that you were so aware of my habits that you should judge of where you should find me," she said, crisply, the darkness hiding the pallor of her face. "And as for the moonrise, surely a quiet place where one will not be disturbed is the only one to thoroughly do it justice, Mr. Blake."

She would allow him no mercy, and he bit his lip angrily. She could not see the flash in his eyes as he gazed down upon her on her lonely seat under the tall old tree, her hand lying lightly upon the sleek head of the dog. Then he made one of his bold moves. He laughed pleasantly, and said, as he struck a pebble with his foot:

"I thought you might be uneasy about your father, Miss Nan. We all know of the threatened danger to the city should the rabble wake and strike its blow in the back, which it will undoubtedly do. I have had the thought in my mind for some time, but I am sorry to know you also are disturbed by the knowledge."

"One could not fail to be troubled by the knowledge of villainy like that," Nan said, quietly. "Where the blow must come from a coward who is too dishonorable to openly face one. I hate cowardice. I have a perfect scorn for the rabble that must make up a riot of that sort."

"But if you are at all anxious in regard to your father," he said, "Miss Nan, I will gladly do anything I can for you. Would it be of any use for me to telegraph for you to learn if there is any other cause of his delay? I will gladly do anything that I can, as I said. You are so unwilling to let me help you."

She relented somewhat. She lifted up to his her wan little face with the trace of tears around the silken lashes.

"You are very good, Mr. Blake," she said, "but I think father will come very soon. It could scarcely affect him should there be an outbreak. His office is so far down town, you know."

"It might cause him some inconvenience in getting home," he said; "that is all, Miss Nan. But if by sending word, I could at all ease your anxiety, I will most gladly do so."

"You are kind," she repeated; "but I think there is really no need, Mr. Blake. I am sure he will come soon, or send word himself why he is detained. I am more anxious for him to come," she added, her voice softening somewhat, "because I wished so much to give him the good news of mother's improvement. She was conscious for some time to-day, and the nurse gives us all encouragement of her speedy recovery. It is so good to know."

"I am indeed glad of that," he said, and his voice sounded sincere. He held out his hand, and the girl laid one of her small white hands within it. "But if there is nothing I can do for you I must leave you, Miss Nan. I am more glad that I can say of your mother's improvement."

He was glad. Now there was no reason why he should not bring some of his plans into effect. The knowledge of her mother's condition had kept him from putting them into operation, as it might seriously disadvantage him to push any harsh measures with death so near their doors. And he had fully made up his mind if fair means proved unavailing then he would use those that would prove more effective.

But Nan, sitting in the shadow of the elms, did not know of what he was thinking as he walked on in the pale moonlight, and felt her heart warm toward him more than it had at any other time in her life. It was so good to have sympathy. Her father had failed her, but here was a would-be lover at hand to do her lightest bidding gladly.

There was the rumble of wheels and the muffled sound of hoofs along the dusty road, and Nan sprang up breathless to watch for its coming. It was their carriage, she knew, for Carlo, recognizing the sound, arose with her, and set his tail wagging as only the home carriage would admit. As it turned in at the gate the girl called, and the driver drew in the horses with quick willingness.

There was no head at the window, and Nan knew if her father had been there he would have ended her suspense at once, and the disappointment in her face melted the heart of the coachman. Removing the reins from one hand to the other, he unbuttoned his coat, and drew from an inner pocket one of those terrifying yellow envelopes, and handed it down to her with a gruff but kindly word to the effect that he hoped there was no ill news in it, while the girl tore it open with trembling hands.

"I waited fer ther eight o'clock train, Miss Nan," the man said. "An' thin ther letter kem, an' I driv right home ter let ye know."

She nodded.

"You can drive on, Jim," she said. "I will walk up."

"No bad news, I hope, Miss Nan?' touching his hat respectfully as he drew the reins together over the backs of the horses and they started up the drive.

"Oh," the girl's voice was almost cheerful, "no bad news at all, Jim, thank you. Father will not be able to come up to-night, that is all."

But in her heart she knew it was not quite all.

"Do not worry, Nan," the message ran; "I will be up all right to-morrow if all goes well, as there is no doubt it will. At present there is considerable disturbance here, and I do not like to leave, as there might be need of my presence. You are not to worry."

Not to worry. It was all put in a quiet manner that she need not worry, but she knew better than he guessed of the need there was to worry. This "disturbance" of which he wrote so mildly she knew meant much more than that—meant, no doubt, the very riot they had been dreading. Of course her father would not come up to the quiet of the country, and leave the city in such peril. She knew her father too well for that, and was proud of knowing it. Besides, did not the government trust him to aid it, and would he disappoint it because there happened to be peril in the way? She folded the message, and then tore it into fragments, placing them in her pocket. Not an atom of this would there be left to tell any tale to observing eyes.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### A DAY AND A NIGHT.

Nan walked up the drive with a firm step and a face that gave no hint of the tumult within. Dinner had been waiting for the master's arrival, and now she ordered it brought in, and sat there alone at the long table as though she were not alone and lonely

with a heart that ached with presentiment and dread. She ate, too, because she would have no one guess of her thoughts, and gave her orders mechanically but with a semblance of interest, smiling now and then at the willing waiter, who almost guessed her desire before it could be expressed. And she sat out the usual length of time, her mind occupied with its own thoughts, and her soul fairly sick with the dread that she could not silence, try as she might. The city was full of riot, she knew. The rabble would be swarming the streets, or had swarmed the streets, until life was a thing scarcely worth the thought. They would make a mad dash for liberty, and vent their vengeance upon all whom they could reach. That there could be order, and consequently more danger, she was sure could not be. There was never order on the part of rioters, and therein lay their weakness. They had no leaders, and simply crowded like wild beasts broken loose, doing all the damage they could, destroying life and property regardless of the consequences, and then were driven back to their dens, more sullen, more fierce than before, but having learned that their strength was their weakness, and the few of those with order at their heads could master them, as intelligence ever must master ignorance.

But in spite of the victory that she was sure must come, Nan's heart was sick with the knowledge that there must be bloodshed and a fierce struggle ere the victory came. She had been too clearly informed of these things from her father in their quiet talks not to comprehend the outcoming of this. And she knew that her father, under the government, would hold his life of little value if need called for its sacrifice. She was proud of her father and his

grand old spirit, but her heart was aching dully with dread in spite of its brave championship.

She arose from the table with quiet grace and the fears crowded down in her heart, and went up, as was her custom—although not alone—to her mother's door. The nurse knew of her habit, and now came out with kindly interest. She smiled with reassuring brightness as she laid her hand on Nan's arm.

"Your mother is sleeping as sweetly as a baby," she said, softly. "You may rest easy to-night, Miss Courtland, for I think by to-morrow she will be as nearly herself as she could be in her weak state. But she will recover her strength when once she is started on the right road. I am so very glad for you. I knew you would wish to know, and would sleep so much better yourself for being assured of this."

Nan smiled the little slow, pathetic smile that had somehow settled upon her lips within the last hour. She met the kindly eyes of the nurse with her brave blue eyes, as she thanked her gently for this thoughtfulness. Then she turned away and passed down the staircase again, into the quiet study, where the lights were lowered, and the shadows had the corners to themselves and their fantastic imaging. She did not turn up the lights. The shadows were better suited to her present state of depression. She sat down in her father's chair, sinking among the cushions like a child, her golden head warmly pressed upon the crimson plush that had so many times sheltered her father's aching head. She curled among the cushions like a child, an arm close clasping the cushions upon which her head lay, her other, with the loose sleeve falling back, revealing the perfect roundness of its outline, lying loosely along the arm of the chair. She closed her big wistful eyes, and

gave herself up bitterly to the thoughts that would come, that had crowded in upon her during the tiresome meal, during every minute of the last couple of hours of this dreadful evening. She had no one to whom to go, and she longed more for sympathy then than she could ever do. Howard Blake would triumph over her trouble, and perhaps make it an end to gain his victory, that she knew, even when she wished the least to think of it, he was bending his whole nature to do. She would as soon ask the sympathy of a viper as of him. She hated him. She hated him with even more bitterness because he knew of her sore heart as she sat out at the gate that night waiting for her father. She knew that he had read her heart. He had offered her kindness, but she knew instinctively that it was the kindness of one ready to spring. If only she could go to her mother. If only she could have the ready motherly sympathy that had never before failed her. And yet she could not have her mother know of what danger her father was in. Were she in her old state of health, she would keep from her the terrors of the night. If she must bear it she would bear it alone. That was the only thing she could do.

And where was her father all this time? He was at his post of duty, as his daughter was so assured he would be were it necessary. With the basement of a friend's up-town residence as the rendezvous, he and others bent on the same good work of quelling the riot, and yet keeping posted as to its main points in order to send for more effective aid were that to be, spent the night in sleepless watchfulness, now out, now in, comparing notes, keeping the heart brave in the midst of the horrors that were on every hand, though everything was apparently quiet after

the terrible day. The outbreak came suddenly, as they were aware it must come. There were mutterings of the storm, threatening looks, sullen silence preceding the tumult that came like an avalanche. The mobs were dense. When they made their rush, the streets seemed black with their swarming. They used the only weapons with which they were familiar—clubs and stones, and bricks—anything they could lay their hands upon, hurling them at random upon the men who attempted to overpower them. The militia were out promptly, and worked with the order they must use among a set of such wild beasts. They were armed with more effective weapons than the rabble could command. But they did not use the rifles until all else was useless. Broadway was blockaded with timber and anything the hands could lay hold upon. And behind this blockade the shower of stones, and bricks, and clubs were hurled with a terrible effect, that must have been worse had there been any leader among them.

Every one joined in the defense. Business men left their stores, every one joined the ranks that could lift a hand. These were mustered together and given a commander, and were prepared to do their best should life be the penalty. The city was comparatively defenseless, for the greater force of the militia had been called away for defense elsewhere, and the human brutes knew of this. But they reckoned without their host when they were sure of an easy victory over those that were left. Not a man among them but fought for life and death, and heart and home, with the honor of their country at stake, and the honor of their city in jeopardy. And when the day was spent and darkness upon the city, a sul-

len silence brooded over everything, that foretold the storm was not quite spent. Many a fire flag fluttered up from different parts, showing that the fiend, though quiet, was not quelled. And in the midst of these horrors, when many a time it seemed as though the brute element must conquer, Nan's father was among the fiercest of the city's defenders. He struggled with the youngest and most daring. He forgot all else save the mad desire to overpower this heathenish onslaught. His blood was up, as it had threatened many a time when he knew of the boiling fury among the lower class, and he would fight it as he would so many hounds gone mad. He knew that Nan must be anxious about him, but rested in the hope that she had heard nothing certain about the struggle that was going on. He sent the message as soon as he could safely get where he could do so. He knew that even a hard certainty was preferable to the terrible suspense she would endure should he send no word. But the immediate need of action left little time to such thoughts, and the day was too full of things more terrible to admit of his giving more than a passing thought to the quiet life at the old Hall, where his wife lay so low, and his daughter waited to know the worst. More than once he barely escaped with his life, so eager was he to rush into the midst of the more terrible part of the struggle, held back only by the discipline that was all that could conquer this brute fury, that had no head and no heart, and was of the most part in such a state of intoxication as to be hardly more than beasts.

"I'd shoot any one of them, or all of them, as I would so many wild beasts," he declared, excitedly, to one of the officers who was beside him, as they

were waiting for orders to enter in the fight. "They are hardly better than such, and have no human feeling. Why should they be treated with any consideration whatever? For what are we waiting, anyway?"

"They are brutes," the officer acknowledged, his own blood rushing madly to enter active service, "but we must treat them as though they are men inasmuch as they have to be ruled by strategy as well as the maddest onslaught of the army. We can subdue these rioters, but it is going to take time enough to make them see that we know how to maneuver as well as they. It is not brute force alone that will win!"

The noise was deafening. The crowds yelled and swore, and filled the air with their foul breaths reeking with the fumes of the drinking that had given the failing courage to make this dash for liberty. It was as though pandemonium were let loose along the streets of the city, born of the country's throes. It was a scene that beggared description. No pen could touch the depth of its horror, nor brush catch the lurid lights of this human mass surging against the city's law.

And poor little Nan, with her golden curls tossed upon her arm, and her tender face clearly defined against the warm hue of the cushions, fell asleep in the silent old library like a tired child, a half smile on her parted lips, as though her dreaming were sweeter than her waking. For all her anxious picturing of what was going on in the city came no nearer the truth than could have come to one unaware of the lowest depths of some of that city's life. And there the butler found her when he went to close the house for the night, and stood beside her a

moment ere he waked her, his wrinkled old face almost tender as he looked down upon the pure, sweet face with its warm red mouth and flushed cheeks against which the silken lashes lay like tints of gold. She was so like a child among the huge cushions of the chair. It seemed as though the trouble of the world could never touch her. As though life and love and all good things should come at her feet. As though sorrow were a thing too harsh for this tender face and smiling mouth. But who can read the heart history from the face?

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CORDS OF THE NET.

The carriage came dashing up the drive as though to announce to the waiting girl on the steps that her heart could be at rest, and then the door was opened with a firm hand, and Nan's father was with her, holding the girl close in his arms, listening to her eager words of delight at having him back safe and sound, and the incoherent words mixed in regarding the improvement of her mother. She scarcely knew what words she was using, her heart was so full of gladness and thankfulness, and the relaxation of her anxiety gave her words scarce the necessary sense. But the squire knew that he was at home again after the desperate fighting, and that the gentle woman whose life had been held by such slender cords to earth, was taking a firmer hold upon life and left him nothing to wish for save the end of the terrible war and the return of his boys to the old Hall.

"You shall go up at once to mamma," Nan said, her hands trembling as she helped him remove his duster in the hall. "Of course you shall go at once to mamma, papa dearest, only you must come back to me as soon as ever you can, and tell me all about the trouble down there. I know something about it, indeed I do, from the accounts we received this morning, and I am so thankful to have you safe at home, you blessed Papa Courtland."

She clasped her hands around his arm in an eager, caressing fashion, and then sent him up stairs with the memory of the bright face watching him from the hall beneath, its eyes ashine, its cheeks dimpled with the smiling that could not keep from trembling around the mouth. Nan ordered the dinner brought in with a lighter heart than she did the night previous, and sang again a snatch of the song she hummed then, while waiting with the dog on the piazza steps for her father's return.

"It's a funny old world," she said to herself, "but it's a good world after all, in spite of it being one minute right side down, and the next as light as it ever was. It's so good to have papa here, and mamma getting well. I could almost say there is nothing I am afraid of now. If the boys were only here and the war over!"

But it was not until the dinner had been eaten, and they were once more alone in the study, Nan at her father's feet, that the history of the terrible time of riot was gone over to the listening girl. There were too many private matters connected with the telling that could not be related before the servants, and Nan was the only one, now his wife was too ill to hear such things, to whom the squire told these secrets of his life during the war. For he knew Nan

was a faithful listener, and would keep what she heard to herself.

"And you were in the midst of all those horrors!" cried Nan, as he spoke—lightly it might be, but even then proving the terrors of the time—of the haps and mishaps to himself, and the bravery that met and crushed the turbulent spirit. "If I had known it was so dreadful, papa, I never could have slept as I did. Of course I knew it must be pretty bad to keep you down there, but I never dreamed it was like that."

She shuddered and touched caressingly the hand she held under hers on his knee. She searched his face with anxious eyes to find if there were traces of any harm to him in this fight, and the tender mouth quivered as she thought of the possible ending to the day.

He patted the curly head reassuringly, and smiled into the uplifted eyes. He could smile now. The danger was over, both to the woman in the room overhead and to himself out of the city. The wrinkle of anxiety born of his love for the wife, whom he felt hourly he might be called upon to lose, was smoothing itself out, and his face, rugged and seamed as it was with the life he did not find easy, watching the course of the war, and knowing his own inability to join therein, still had a light of renewed happiness upon it that did the girl's heart good to see. She laughed at him, and leaned her soft cheek against the hand she held.

"It's so good to have you, papa," she said. "Mr. Blake wished to telegraph to your office and learn of the real state of the case, but I would not let him. I did not wish to be under even the slightest obligation to him. He has been very nice—for him—I must say, but I don't want him to do anything

for me. I just couldn't stand having him do anything for me."

"He was here, then, yesterday, Nan?" There was a wrinkle on the squire's brow that his daughter did not understand. His voice was even and slow, but the eyes under their heavy gray brows were flashing with some hidden thought that worked angrily upon him. "Did he tell you of what was happening in the city, Nan?"

"No, papa." His daughter could disguise her feelings as well as he. She was a diplomat in her way, and she could draw one's soul from one almost without being discovered in the act. She might have made a good Inquisitor, for she could smile and let her eyes look kindly at one while she was hiding her heart. She smiled now as she met her father's searching gaze. She even shook her head gayly at him, lifting her sweet face full in the light of the lamps. "He seemed to know as little about what was going on as I, though he said he had been fearing some such thing, and offered merely to find out for me if I so desired. It's quite needless to state that I did not desire."

"Most certainly not," said the squire, concisely.

The frown deepened on his brow. There was no answering smile on his rugged face for this daughter who could almost always call up a smile on her father's face.

She brushed her soft hand lightly to and fro over the rough hand she held upon his knee. She shook her golden head with a little bit of defiance, for she knew she could not long defend the man she so detested, and if her father continued to keep that air of anger toward him, she could simply say no more, and let his anger vent itself upon the man. For

that he was angry with Mr. Blake for something she had not a doubt. She would not ask, but she would learn in her own way. Her father would tell her. He told her so many things that were of more importance than anything relating to Mr. Blake could possibly be.

"You poor old papa," she said lightly, with a tender little laugh, "why should you be angry with the horrid man when we have so much else to talk about? He was very nice to me. Why, he even offered me any horse in his stable to ride if I wish. Isn't that a piece of generosity on his part? And he was really very nice. Come, tell me more about the dreadful time you had yesterday, and forget Mr. Blake. I had so much rather hear." But even as she said this she knew he would not talk to her about the riot, or any other thing while he was so roused. And she knew, too, that before long he would have told her all his trouble.

He sat for some time in silence, the frown not leaving his brow, his lips shut close under the gray mustache, his eyes looking beyond his daughter, clouded in intensity of thought. Presently he roused himself as though to break the spell of unpleasant thought, and met the wide, questioning eyes of the girl at his feet, and smiled involuntarily. She patted his hand approvingly, and knew he would not long keep her in the dark respecting this thought.

"It seems to me as though the devil himself had hold of the reins of war," he burst out presently, a flash in his eyes. "It is the devil's own work that keeps it going, anyway. Beg your pardon, Nan, for my strong language, but I cannot contain myself when I think of what we need to end the war and

our utter inability to help give it. Here is this Blake, with more money actually than any man could need or desire, with not even enough patriotism to offer money when he will not go himself—to buy the men to go in his place. And he has crippled me to a certain extent with the money he feels belongs to him, and that I know every day I would like to return if it must be returned, but that I know he can do without, even if I do have to be under that obligation to such a craven spirited man, when our country needs every cent I can spare, and far more, to gain the victory we must gain, but that is hindered because of the lack of money in the treasury. Nan, when I think of the poor fellows suffering hunger and privation, with not even enough to keep them in clothing, and dying day after day on the field for the honor of their country, I believe I have almost an insane desire to murder a man like this Blake. And to think he has the audacity——"

He stopped suddenly. He glanced hurriedly down at the gentle face at his knee, to know if she understood the pause in his rapid words. He would not have her know the man they both despised so thoroughly could pretend to lay claim to her proud, pure hand. She would treat him well for her father's sake. He would treat him as any gentleman should treat another. He could do no less; he would do no more.

Nan shook her head, and laughed bitterly.

"Let's not think any more about it, papa," she said, soothingly.

Nevertheless, she was thinking about it the next morning as she walked down to the summer-house under the rose vines, where the birds were calling, and the air was heavy with the garden scents. She

was thinking of just that as she seated herself upon the sill of the tiny house and spread the flowers she had gathered in her lap to choose one by one for her bouquet. Her smooth, soft brows were puckered in an exaggerated frown as she laid the morning's paper on the floor beside her and proceeded to rest before beginning upon the flowers. It was unusually warm, with scarce a lifting of the leaves under the faint breeze from the southern slope. She removed her broad white hat, letting it slip down her shoulders to the floor. She ran her slim fingers through her hair to lift it and cool her head. She sighed deeply as though to be rid of the oppressive ozone and leave space for new. And leaning her fair head against the door-post, she let her hands lie among the loose flowers and her thoughts wander at will with her eyes bent on the hazy slope out yonder toward the south. She was somehow growing braver to open the damp sheet as it was brought in to her at breakfast, and had so far seen nothing to terrify her excepting the natural sadness one would feel at the account of such battles as were being fought. This morning she had left the paper to be read in the cooler summer-house, though she had glanced down the long columns to catch any name that might mean sorrow to her, but she had seen nothing, and was singing to herself a low air as she leaned—her thoughts not on her song—under the shadow of the roses, with the carnations and blue bells lying in her lap for her pleasure. She was feeling rather tired, too, for the excitement and worry of the past day and night had told upon her sunny temper, and she simply longed to rest there in the garden that the boys had always loved, and where her friend had bidden her farewell with a tender thought of her fu-

ture life, should he never come back to her. She had not thought of that, she had not troubled about his never coming to her, he was so strong and so necessary to the world, it seemed to her. If he should never come back to her—she could not think of that. She roused herself, and would not think of it. She began setting the flowers one against another to try the effect of each, but it was an aimless trial. She knew she would in the end place them as she happened to lift them, and take them in to her mother, as she had done every day since her illness—since Ned went away. And thinking of him and the struggle going on, her thoughts went back to the man whom her father had so railed against the previous evening when they sat in the old library talking their evening talks.

The feeling of dread was upon her again, and she could not shake it off, though she tried even to lift her voice to more gayety in her song. She had no heart for singing, that was evident, whether because it was so stiflingly warm in the garden, or because she really had no wish for singing. She gave up the attempt and dropped the flowers, letting her chin rest in her two hands, as she rested her elbows on her knees and thought, thought, thought, till it seemed to her she could think no more, that her mind and brain would go mad if she did not give up this dreadful thinking.

It seemed to her impossible that she could hate Howard Blake more than she did the day before, but at the present moment it seemed to her she had never hated him, that the feeling of distrust and dislike she had felt for him were mild forms compared with the feeling she possessed for him at that moment. She would not lift her hand—no, not if,

as she said, he were dying at her feet. But she was powerless to do anything. She must simply sit down like so many other women, and wait for the war to end, and all things to come around somehow. She could not even have Helen's feeling that she was doing something for the poor laddies giving their lives for her and her country. She had heard from Ned not many days ago—when was it? Could it be but three days since? It seemed like years to her now, thinking of it. But the few words she had received were written many days before, and reached her only after wanderings of which she could never know. She took out the scrap of paper, torn from a pocket diary, and read the few words of cheer scribbled upon it in pencil in a moment of leisure.

There were footsteps on the gravel of the walk, and Nan looked up, her hand closing over the bit of paper lying upon the flowers in her lap.

"It seems to me that the sun shines simply for you not to disappoint the flowers, Miss Nan," said Mr. Blake.

"It is kind of you to think so," said Nan, icily.

She was sorry he had come. It was so hard for her anyway that morning, and she did not want him to be there to face her. She was unhappy, and it was only in her happiest moments he should have ventured near her.

"Not at all!" and the man laughed, without a trace of the knowledge that she was out of temper. "But you do seem to be so heart and soul with the flowers that I can find no other cause for our sunny weather." Then his face settled into its usual inscrutible lines as he added, his voice softening with an attempt at kindliness: "I came over to tell you

how sorry I am for the news. I knew he was a friend of yours, and he was really a fine fellow. It is not much of an account, but tells the saddest part of all."

He was watching her closely, and saw the color fade and return in swift tides to her face. He was watching to note to the least degree the power of this news spoken of. She had not seen it, he knew, ere he spoke of it, for she would not have been sitting there so quietly. He knew full well she was more than a friend to the man.

She lifted her eyes with a great terror dawning in them, the color leaving lips and cheeks, the tremble of the sweet mouth almost more than even he could bear. Her hand crushed unheeded the bit of paper in her lap. Then she arose and confronted him, the flowers—and the paper with them—falling unheeded to the ground.

"Of what news do you speak, Mr. Blake?"

There was a strained sound to her voice that she did not recognize. She heard herself speaking as though she were miles away. Somehow she felt dead. She was listening to some other girl—some other, whose heart was failing because there was news for her.

Involuntarily he reached out and touched her hand, but she did not seem to notice it. He could almost have had it in his heart to wish the words unspoken.

"Have you not seen it? I thought you knew. Poor little Nan!" he said. Still she stood there like a stone, her face immovable, as though it were in truth the image of a woman, and not the tender girl who had so sweetly and unselfishly comforted her father through the trying time they had passed together.

"I thought you knew, or I would not have come——"

She interrupted him in her stony fashion.

"Tell me first what you mean," she said.

Her eyes were searching his face, and his eyes fell. How could he face the terror in her own?

He stooped in answer, and taking up the paper opened to a notice on one of the inner sheets, where the "valiant death of brave young Captain Travers" was given in a few glowing words. He was dead, then. Nan could not see how the girl hearing of this could stand so quietly as she, with no sort of feeling. She could not comprehend how she stood there without a trace of feeling, listening to the man whom she hated with such intensity as he uttered his words of regret for the loss of her friend. Of her friend? And was it not more than friend? Did not his words at their parting prove to her the deeper meaning he would give them when he came back from the war? When he came back from the war! Why, he would never come back from the war. He could never come back. She roused herself as she realized, or began to realize, to whom this message was sent. It was she, Nan Courtland, her very own self on whom this blow was falling. It was no other girl. She had no need to pity any one but herself. And here she was standing quite calmly listening to the words of sympathy Howard Blake was uttering. She would not let him see how this news affected her. She roused and turned as though she would enter the house, and in so doing felt the touch of his hand on hers. This gave her the strength she needed, and she drew herself up to her full height, then only reaching to his shoulder, and held out her hand for the paper.

"It is very sad," she said, in her ordinary voice.

"I did not see it as I glanced over the columns this morning. But it is very sad. How it will grieve his mother."

She met his eyes with an unfathomable look in her own, and held the paper in her hands, that did not tremble in the least.

"He was a pleasant friend, and we will all miss him, now that he will never come back."

She caught her breath here a trifle, but resumed as calmly as before:

"We all somehow have the idea that those we wish for will come back to us when the war is over, but I don't know why we should, when there are daily so many falling. I wonder if his sister was near him at the last?"

The man before her was amazed at her power of self command under circumstances so trying. He felt a renewed determination to win her by any means in his power. He would not lose in this game. He loved her fiercely at that moment. Nearly always she roused only wrath and the desire for revenge by winning her in spite of herself, and then proving to her that he was not one to safely scorn. But his face was as inscrutible as was hers, and the sun was shining and the birds singing softly in the boughs overhead.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### THAT WOUND A HEART.

Nan even laughed before Howard Blake left her. She answered him as crisply as was her wont, and held the paper steadily, as though she were glad the news were no worse. Yet over and over in her

mind she was asking if there could anything worse have come to her.

The sun was shining, but what did she care? There was even a breeze stealing up from the south, where the clovers dotted the fields with pink. How could the world go on as though there had no terrible thing fallen upon her under the sunny sky? How could she go on living her life? How could she be the comforter of her father any more when she had no heart for comforting any one? Must she go on living her life as though in truth there had nothing happened? Would this man never know that she did not want to talk to him? Did he not know that Captain Travers was more than merely a friend to her? Had he lived so near them all his life not to know that his death must be more than a trifling thing to her? Had he no heart that he could think of the sunshine and the flowers when her life seemed at an end? How cruel the world was to keep on its even course of sunshine and blossom and song when for lives like hers all sunshine and blossom and song had died.

She hated the flowers. With sudden fury she moved so that her tiny slippers crushed the flowers at her feet. She would never again spend the pleasant hour in the old garden gathering and arranging flowers that were no longer friends reminding her of other friends. No, never, never, would she gather flowers there. And why would this man stand talking to her of them and speaking now and then in the midst of the rest, kindly words for the man for whom she could wait forever and he would not come.

"I think a canter would do you good, you are looking really pale this morning," Mr. Blake said

presently. "You know you are at liberty to take one at any time, Miss Nan."

"Your horses would break my neck," Nan said. She laughed bitterly, and pushed the flowers with one foot over and over in the dirt. She seemed to have utterly forgotten the note that had fallen with them to the ground. "You are very kind, Mr. Blake, but I think I will live a little longer."

He should not know her heart was dead. He should never know life was dead for her in all the years that might come.

He left her by and by. That the news had wounded her more than any word or action of hers should show, he knew full well. That she would never allow herself to show any sign of feeling in his presence, had he not had sufficient proof? But he would win her. He had set his heart on doing that, and he would move heaven and earth to accomplish it. It was not merely revenge for her scorning him that now gave him stronger determination, but the knowledge that he loved her for herself—for her tender face and gentle womanliness and dainty ways. Even the crushing of the flowers under her feet had a grace that could belong to no one but herself. He loved her, and he would win her. There was more than one way, if one should fail. He strode down the clover field with a firm step, and held his head as proudly as though he had already fought and won.

And poor little Nan sat down again when he had left her, and buried her face in her two hands, though not a tear did she shed. She had turned to stone, she said to herself over and over. No one with a warm heart could bear that news and still have only the feeling that she was dead, that there

was nothing in life, that the song of even the birds sounded harsh to her, and she could not cry. The birds were singing, and she wished she might stop them. They kept saying over and over so many strange things. There was the sunshine and the wind coming up from the south from over the clover, and she could feel it touch her face as though it were sorry for her. She did not like to be pitied, but she had no power to help it. What would her father say when he came home at night? Would he pity her, too, and say "poor little girl," as she would not want him to. Perhaps there was something in the paper that would help to soften her feeling. She opened the sheet, and found the place where Howard Blake had pointed out the notice. She read it and re-read it. They spoke in high terms of his bravery and loyal spirit. They could not do less. He was brave and loyal to friends as well as to his country, and why should they not say it of him when he was dead? When he was dead! She could not quite understand. This dreadful feeling of stoniness seemed to harden all her powers of thought. But he must be dead—Ned, her old playfellow, her old defender, her champion at all times, her more than friend now—Ned was dead. It seemed so strange to think of it. She could see that he was dead. There it was in black and white. He had died in a grand charge at a moment when hesitation would have meant defeat, and had carried the day with great honor, but had fallen at the last. No doubt Helen was with him. She could not only suffer, but she could go on doing something for those who suffered and died on the field. If she were Helen she would be brave, too. Why, surely she could do almost anything and stand any strain upon

her powers of endurance if this news affected her so little. She must do something. There was surely a place for her, and Helen could manage it. Helen knew what to do, and would gladly have her go. Helen was brave, and would help her to be brave, and she needed all the bravery she could have to live her life from which all the sunshine and the blossom and the song had gone. She had so wished to go with Helen. Now the time was coming when she must go.

She arose, and looked down at the crushed flowers under her feet. A slow smile crept sadly around her white lips. She felt a sort of pity for them, they were so pretty lying with the dirt upon them in the path. She must let no one guess of this strange thing that had come over her heart. She would keep the paper, and maybe after she had read it times enough it might take away that feeling. She could not live for years and years, as she would doubtless have to live, with the icy feeling around her heart.

She raised her dainty gown from the dust of the gravel, and took up her scissors again, going down the walk among the flowers.

"What if my flowers are dead," she said, "I will still gather them for mother. After all, these are prettier flowers than those I crushed."

The color was coming back to her face and her lips. She would keep the pallor in her heart. That was cold enough, and no one would know. There was a wound in her heart—there must be a wound in her heart—that had let out all the warm blood that made life so brilliant and so sweet. But this wound should heal, though it leave a scar, and no one would guess of its being there.

There was a searching look in her father's eyes as he stooped to kiss her that evening on the piazza, where she met him as usual, dressed in a dainty white gown, with blue ribbons at throat and waist, but there was no tell-tale pallor in the sweet lifted face, and the blue eyes were as bravely steady as ever.

"It is sad about Ned," Nan said, of her own free will, when they were again in their old room. There was not even a break in her voice, only a graver tone. "He was always so good-natured and brave, we will miss him terribly, won't we, papa? And I cannot help wondering how Helen bears it. If it were one of my brothers——"

"But if it were for your country, Nan?" There was a touch of reproach in her father's voice. "I would give both my sons, if it is the will of the Lord to take them, though they are such brave fellows, and I hope there will be no need of either not returning to us. But, oh, my dear little girl, you cannot know the terrible suffering the war lays upon our land. If anything will end it, I would too gladly give it. Captain Travers died as bravely as he had lived, carrying at the last an almost reckless charge against the enemy, and though he fell—poor, brave fellow—we can but be glad that he did his work well. I have tried to find out all I could about him, but in the paper office they said the note was sent in with others, and they knew no more. At Washington, where I telegraphed, they stated that this name had been sent in with the list of killed, and they had learned of the exceptional bravery of the young officer, and would undoubtedly have given him higher rank, had he lived, for his daring and

successful charge. That is all I know, Nan. Perhaps Helen will tell you more when she writes."

"But Helen has so little time to write, and I hear so seldom," Nan said. "I am afraid we will hear nothing more than this until the terrible war is over. I wish I could do something to help it on, papa."

Again he searched her face as though to read her innermost thought. Then he stroked the sunny head at his knee. But he made no answer, and Nan continued, softly, almost fearing the reply she would receive:

"Papa, you said if you had twenty sons you would give them all, if necessary, to the country. Are you willing to let your naughty little girl go, too, to do as Helen is doing, even if less than she is doing, for I am not one bit brave, papa. But I want to do what little I can."

He leaned down and lifted the girl's face between his hands, studying it for a moment in silence. His face worked strangely, though after a minute it was set in stern strength. Then he touched her forehead with his lips, and said, rather huskily:

"As my sons are doing what they can, could I refuse to let my daughter do the same? Nan, the old Hall will not be the same place with our sunshine gone from it, but I made a pledge with myself long ago that if your mother was given back to me, and you wished to go, I would not refuse your wish. The country needs every one, dear, and the more brave little women like you there are to help it along the sooner the victory will be ours—for it must be ours. We will win, I am sure, Nan, and my little daughter will have helped on the winning, as well as my two sons."

"It is good of you to say that, papa," Nan said,

but there came a sudden mist before her eyes, and she could not meet the kindly eyes above her.

She leaned her head against the friendly knee, and they were silent for a few minutes. The hand of the squire was gentle if it was rough, and it was with unutterable tenderness he stroked the curly head that might not for many a day rest against his knee, as now it was doing, and his eyes, too, were rather dim, the girl not knowing, her own eyes hidden. Then he said, gently:

"When do you wish to go, Nan? I must prepare your mother, you know, dear, and you must give her time to become accustomed to the thought of not having our little girl around the house at our call, and to keep the sunshine going."

"I will not go until you say I may, papa," Nan said, softly. "You are good to let me go, anyway, papa dearest, and I will wait your own pleasure about going. Only," there was a wistfulness about the tender voice that made the man's heart ache with sudden pity, "don't let it be too far away."

"You shall go next week if you wish," he said, gravely, no hesitation in his voice.

He could not restrict the desires of this poor little sore hearted daughter of his, for in spite of Nan's bravery and effort to hide her heart, her father knew full well the wound that lay open to the least touch beneath the cloak of her pride. And the next instant she was weeping her heart out in his arms.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### AND THEN CUT DEEPER.

"She may be more ready with her reply. She would not wish me to think she cared for him, and

this may be my time. If she refuses, or gives me any more of her devilish temper, I'll set the trap a little deeper. She'll not escape me if there is power in earth or heaven to win her. I never give over when once my mind is made up."

It was a day or two after that on which the news reached the Hall that Ned Travers was dead, and Howard Blake had timed his visit well, for he knew Nan's proud spirit would never show to him how deeply the wound had cut, or that Captain Travers was more to her than a pleasant friend. Had she not shielded her heart well that morning, even laughing as though there were nothing gone wrong, save that the intense pallor of her face and the set lines of the sweet mouth had betrayed her. But she need not have so attempted to hide from him the secret of her heart. He had fathomed it long ago, and would use it to work his end. He was capable of that, and worse, if necessary, to win her. He smiled grimly at the thought of how well he had worked his plans, and how they had succeeded. And he could be more cruel than he had been if she did not give him kindly answer to what he would say to-day. There was nothing should thwart him now; he had gone too far for that. A sudden strange pallor left his face deathlike for a moment, and his black eyes flashed fiercely under the frowning brows. He had gone too far to go back—yes, that was true, and there was nothing should turn him back. After all, she was well worth the trouble. The thought of his revenge for all her slights alone was worth the trouble, but he had almost lost the thought of revenge in his new thought of love. She was worth loving, and she was worth fighting for.

He paused at the wicket, and looked down the

path toward the summer house, where it was Nan's custom to be at that time in the morning, with her flowers. But she was not there. She had gathered her flowers earlier that morning, so that she could sit with her mother when the nurse would allow. There was a sweet sadness around her mouth as she hurried through the paths, lingering not at all over her favorites, and fashioned the bouquet as she walked back to the house, ready for the call to go to her mother. It had seemed to her that there was nothing worse could come to her than this that had fallen. Her father had offered no word telling her of his knowledge of how sore her heart was as she lay weeping so hysterically in his arms, but she knew full well he understood, and the thought somehow gave her strength. This vent to her suppressed feelings had done her good, too, and the terrible stony feeling had left her heart. That Ned was dead and could never come back to her she fully realized during the long hours she spent in her room afterward, but she could command herself, and could go about her duties as gently as though it were not so, for she had renewed courage and hope in the thought of being able to go and do for those other soldiers what some one must have done for him, and she would be brave and tender as she would have wished his nurse to be to him when he was borne in, with the dreadful death wound in his side. She shivered when she thought of all these little details, when she pictured, with all the graphic imagination a slight knowledge offered, how he must have suffered, and yet how brave he was during those few minutes that he lived. If he only might have sent one word to cheer her through the work she would take up for his sake. Thinking of this brought

back to her remembrance the note he sent her not so very long ago, and that had been with her so constantly, though there was little need of her reading it over again, she knew so well every word by heart. She smiled sadly as she paused in the garden, where the shadows were darker than they had been for a long time, there being no sunlight to-day, the heavens gray with clouds. She paused and put her hand in her pocket for the note. But it was not there. She started in wonder and dismay, and only remembered that it must have dropped, and been crushed among the flowers she so ruthlessly trod upon that dreadful morning when Howard Blake broke so abruptly to her the news of her friend's death. She had it in her hand when he came up the garden, she remembered, and after that she had no recollection of what became of it, only it must have dropped and been crushed with the flowers. The quick tears sprang to her eyes, but she would not let them fall. It was her own carelessness that had robbed her of her friend's last written word, and she should not spend any time in vain weeping. But she bit her lip with vexation as she turned for a moment, and looked down to where she stood that morning when the dread news came. The walk had been cleared of all dead flowers and leaves that fell, as was the gardener's habit every morning, and her flowers must have been gathered with the others and thrown away. Perhaps John knew of the white bit of paper among the flowers. She would ask him. If he had found the note he might have saved it for her. Or if he had not found it he would search and perhaps find it for her. But no, John had seen nothing of the paper, had seen no paper in the garden on that morning. There seldom was paper there. If

there had been he would almost certainly have noticed it. Was she sure she dropped it there? Of course she was sure, and John was a stupid fellow. The paper was gone surely, and she had no one to thank for it but herself.

Had Howard Blake, standing at the gate in the garden, known Miss Nan's sad heart that morning, he might have softened his own heart toward her, and given over in a little his set determination to make sure of her in one way or another. Should she refuse him, or have no kindly word of a better answer than refusal, at some future time, he would work his plans as he had laid them for such a need. But he was already put out at not finding her in the garden, and felt no softening toward her as he passed up the walk to the house. Should she be out, he muttered, as he mounted the steps, should she be out, he would either wait her return or go to meet her, for he would not be hindered in any way today. He had no patience, and could brook no delay. But she would not be out, for she had been no farther than the garden or the gate under the elms, where she sat waiting for her father some two or three nights ago, since her mother's illness. If she were not in the garden, or on the lawn she would be in the house. He would see her. He would not be put off by any hindrance fate might see fit to lay in his path. He would know that day, that hour if there was any hope of winning Nan Courtland by fair means. If these failed, he could still fall back upon the darker means he would not hesitate to use.

But Nan was in. She was in her mother's room, and came down, after a short delay, to meet him. There was a sweet gravity about her reception of him that sent a thrill of hope along his blood. But

he would not trust to her greeting. There were few she greeted other than kindly. It was the answer she would give him that should satisfy him, not the gentleness of her first few words.

"It is good to know your mother is really so much improved," he said, smiling, when they were seated, he on the wide chair with his back to the window, she on a divan where the light fell full upon her face. "It has been a weary time for you and your father, Miss Nan. I am glad for both of you."

She smiled slowly, her eyes meeting his kindly. Any one would be kind to another who said such pleasant words of her mother. Still, there was something about him this morning that oppressed her, she knew not why. She toyed nervously with a fan that lay on the stand beside her. She could not be herself, try as she would.

"You are very good, Mr. Blake," she said. "It is delightful to have mother again. Just think, it is such a long time since she was with us, and we wanted her so much just at this dreadful time, when we cannot know what day the papers might tell us of what we would not know—of what we would not have happen. Sometimes when I look over the list of wounded or killed, after some of these frightful battles, it seems as though the boys must bear charmed lives to go through so safely. I wonder if the war will never end."

"All things have an end," Mr. Blake said, quietly, "even such evils as this war, Miss Nan. But sometimes it does seem as though it would last years longer. Every day brings some still more indisputable proof of it. The Confederates have some marvelous generals, and will carry the thing as nearly to victory as they can, that is why the war cannot end

quite yet. They are fighting for what they think is right as well as our soldiers are."

"Yes," Nan said, gravely. She let the fan fall in her lap, and folded her hands with intensity as she added, with sudden fire: "Oh, I wish I were a man to fight them. I could give them the will and the manhood, anyway, and the truest side must win, and I am so sure ours is the truest side, and the winning will come if it is long in coming. All things do come if we wait." Then the fire died from her face and eyes as she leaned back among the cushions tiredly, and smiled a sad little smile, saying, slowly, with a quiver in her voice, "But it is so long we have to wait."

Howard Blake could have found it in his heart to forgive her all the unkind speeches she had made to him, all the many unkind little acts she had been guilty of because of her dislike of him, when he sat with her intense face before him, and the quiver in the sweet, low voice. He would gladly have comforted her had she given him the right. He would even have yielded some of his harsh plans that should make her his whether she would or no, but he could not do it with his present hope. And then —as he thought of it the old sinister smile lurked around his thin lips—he had gone too far to turn back one iota. She should give him her answer today, now, and should it prove other than the answer he would have, then the net of his plans should be drawn tighter about her, and her power to escape him gradually weakened. For win her he would, by fair means or foul. He had not planned in what words he should tell her of his wish. He had determined to tell her that he would win her, and that was all. That the words would come at the right

time, he had not a doubt. When had words ever failed him? And they surely would never fail him in the presence of such a wee woman as Nan Courtland. But as he sat there with her pure, pale face before him, and her frank eyes looking into his, he grew afraid of what he might say, and his courage failed him almost to his leaving the words unsaid altogether for that day. But he laughed inwardly as he thought of this girl's daring to refuse him, and ere Nan knew of what he would do, he had arisen and stood before her, stooping to catch her hands in his, a flush on his dark face, a light in his black eyes that startled her.

"Nan," he said, swiftly—"Nan, look up—listen to me. You have always been cruel to me; be kind to me this morning, and tell me that you will give me hope—that you will love me some time, if you do not love me now, for I love you, Nan—I love you, and I will win you."

She shrank from the pain he was inflicting crushing her hands in his, his eyes upon her fiercely, as though he were capable of killing her should she say him nay. She tried to draw her hands from his, but he would not let them go. A flush came to her cheeks and a flash in her eyes. Her lips curved scornfully and her voice was steady with wrath as she said, icily:

"Mr Blake, I have never given you the slightest right to say this to me. I have shown you in every way a woman could how utterly I dislike you. Forgive me if this sounds harsh, but you have no right to think I would have any other answer for you. I have tried to be kind to you lately, for you have tried to be kind to me, but this——" the scorn in her voice made his eyes blaze, and his voice was shaken

by fury as he interrupted her through clenched teeth:

"This, as you say, in your scornful voice, Miss Nan —this you have given me no right to expect, as you say in your answer, I will show you I do expect. I will win you, Nan Courtland, whether it be ten years from now, or but a month hence, win you I will, and when I come to you again your answer will not be so scornful as it is now. I will move heaven and earth to win you, but I will succeed. And then," he leaned toward her, laughing bitterly, "then you shall see that I am not to be scorned by you. Then you may be grateful that I have spared you the suffering that I might have given. Then you will acknowledge that both you and your father are so deeply in my debt that to answer yes, should I ask it, would be an honor you little deem it now."

She had arisen and confronted him, drawn to her full height, her blue eyes afire with womanly indignation at his taking advantage of her few kind words in this manner. He had thrown her hands aside scornfully, and now she clenched the slim white hands at her side as she stood before him in her proud womanhood.

"You forget yourself, Mr. Blake. I knew that you were capable of some act of meanness when you did not press your claim upon my father, but I could scarcely have believed you could sink to this. Would you win my father's daughter through the hold you might have upon him financially? Let me tell you, no Courtland is to be won in that way. And no true woman would listen to such barter. My father, Howard Blake, loves his country and his daughter too well to give her into the keeping of a man who refuses to lift his hand to aid in the slight-

est degree the sufferings of his country and her soldiers. I should have given you your answer more kindly, but I cannot conceive how you for one moment suppose I could have answered differently, knowing you as I do."

He ground his teeth with rage at her swift words of scorn. Had she been a man he would have struck her where she stood. As it was, he would be even with her. He would win—had he not warned her that he would win even if he had to move heaven and earth to do so? He would come to her again, and she would not meet his suit then with this scorning. He had worked his plans well so far, but the future would show with what cunning he could devise a way to prove his boast not vain. He would win her by other means, now fair means had failed. He held the net in his hands, and could draw the cords tighter at his will. She should feel his power, and he would have his revenge. Every word she had spoken in her anger that day should be but stronger cords to tighten the net about her life. He had other means to make his power felt should this claim upon her father prove unavailing. He had not woven his net in vain. He knew well the squire's position toward the government, and a word from him would set a crowd of maddened brutes upon his track; or there was their mode of striking in the dark. He would draw his snare daily nearer and nearer the attaining of his end. She should not escape him—she could not escape him—he had gone too far to turn back.

He laughed as scornfully as she could have done, and turned back as he was leaving the room, facing her as she stood full in the light of the high window. There was a gleam of triumph in his black

eyes that sent the blood surging back upon her heart, and set her face like marble.

"I go now at your bidding, Miss Nan," he said. "When I return, you will have an answer more to my liking. Good-morning."

He bowed, mockingly, and was gone, and she stood where he had left her, looking after him, indignation and a vague fear mingling in her thoughts. She had done her part of treating him well as she could up to now. She had kept a tight rein upon her hatred of him because of his hold upon her father, but now she had lost all by her angry words. And yet she could have done no different should he come as he had then. He must have seen how she detested him. He was not so blind as not to know that she—the daughter of a loyal father, the sister of two brave brothers—could never have a kind answer to such words as his. Was her heart not sore enough that he must come in on her life in this fashion? Had she not enough sadness without feeling that his anger would seek to harm her or those dearer than herself? If she had kept her temper—if she only could have kept her temper and given him a kinder answer, though never other than she did, she might have done her duty better, but how could she have done so? How could she endure his presuming without resenting it? And yet her heart was sore and troubled all the day through, because of the threat that he left with her.

## CHAPTER XV.

### NOT RECKONING THE END.

"What is it, papa?" Nan demanded, when they left her mother's room, after spending almost an

hour there, in the evening. They were going down the stairs to the library, and Nan's hands were around her father's arm, her face lifted anxiously to his. For she knew that the wrinkle between his brows meant more than usual trouble, though he had kept up bravely and proved by no word that anything was wrong. "You needn't try to hide it from me," she added, and now her voice was half merry and her face arch, lifted up to his. "You needn't try, papa, because I would find it out, anyhow, and you would only have your bother for nothing. Is there any more trouble in the city with the rioters, or is it something other than that, that makes that dreadful frown on your face? I don't like to see it, and therefore you are to confess to me at once, and free your mind of its evils."

"Every one is worried about the war, Nan," the squire said, quietly, endeavoring to turn her off in that way, not wishing to tell her the true cause of his anxiety. "It seems as though times were growing worse every day for our soldiers, and we can do so very little for them."

"But the times have been growing worse steadily since the war began," Nan said, calmly, with a little air of wisdom, "and you have not before come home with that troubled face. It is more than that, and we who are comrades in the home ranks may as well comfort each other. I know it is more than that, papa dearest, so you may as well tell me."

She knew it was more than what he said, and there was a dread dawning in her heart that it might be due to some villainy of Howard Blake's. His face, as it looked when he left her that morning, had haunted her through the day, and she felt instinctively that he would be true to his threat of ven-

geance for her answer to his suit. Not that she cared for herself, for she had not the slightest fear of him, for herself, but she would do all she could to keep her father from more worry and anxiety than had already befallen him. Now, as she looked searchingly up in her father's face, seamed with so many years, the latter of which had been so full of worry, that even his sturdy nature must yield to its influence, she realized that he was growing old, and weak, and stooping about the shoulders, that had seemed to her from her earliest remembrance, the strongest, proudest shoulders man could possess, and she could not bear to think that it was through any forgetfulness, on her part of his comfort, that any new trouble had fallen upon him.

"Poor papa," she said tenderly, giving the arm she held an affectionate little pressure, feeling, with a pang at her heart, how his usually firm step was weakened. "Poor, dear papa. You are bothering over something that will seem so much lighter when once you have told your little Nan. I am so truly anxious to know, that you cannot refuse to tell me. Come, here is your chair, and here am I at your feet in our pretty confessional, and you are to tell me, without one speck of fear, all that there is in your heart. Don't keep a thing back, papa dear; it will do you good to tell your Nan."

She stroked softly and lightly the hand upon his knee, and watched him with loving eyes, her lifted face tender with sympathy that touched the strong man's heart as words could not have done. She had learned so thoroughly in the past year how to reach his heart to comfort him, now especially since her mother was unable to fill her part to the brave old squire. She had so studied to comfort him, and sure-

ly she would not fail him now, when there was added sorrow upon him.

Her comforting was so sweet to the squire. He loved this small daughter of his with an intensity and depth that he wondered at himself, and placed her always even before the two sons, of whom any father might well be proud.

There was a strength and purity about her that drew the strong man's proud nature, and a sweetness withal that had long ago, when the world was somewhat younger, won the heart of the gallant captain of the guards, when he met pretty Cora Stanhope at a ball. Nan's sweetness refreshed him as her sturdy old war spirit strengthened him, and therefore he came to her when he could never have gone to another, excepting the one woman who was then unable to do so. He stooped now and touched tenderly the sunny head, with its bonny curls, as he said gently, his steel blue eyes softening, meeting the frank eyes lifted to his.

"Always my brave Nan. What will the old father do when his sunbeam is gone from the old Hall, and some brave laddie on the battle field claims her care? It will be hard at first, Nan, but I would not keep you here, when you are needed there, not if I could."

"But you're not telling me of what you are thinking, papa." Nan leaned her head against the hand on his knee, in answer to his tender words of her going, though she could not quite bring herself to speak of her going. "If your little Nan can help you, remember you are to tell her what troubles you, or her help will be a blind sort of thing."

"But why should I burden you with any trouble, little girl?"

The squire's face worked strangely for a moment.

Had not Nan all a girl should have to make her heart sad? Why should he lay heavier burden upon the willing shoulders, dimpled with the freshness of youth? Why should he darken her sweet life with his worries and struggles to overcome the battle of his own life away from the battle-fields where he would so gladly have fought for his country's honor? How could he let her know in how much she was the cause of his present troubles, and why he had been so long troubled in regard to meeting the exigencies of the case, following any unkind act of hers toward Howard Blake, his creditor? But Nan read his thoughts, and came to his assistance with her quick, strong words.

"It's that horrid Howard Blake, Papa Courtland!" she cried, starting up and facing him with flashing eyes. "You needn't deny it. I am as sure of it as though you had already told me, and I was so afraid he would do this that I know he has done, because—oh, papa, dearest, even you would not have me do it! How could I ever say I could care for such a coward? How could I ever try to do more than tolerate him? I simply couldn't, papa. I am sorry I spoke to him as crossly as I did, but I was so angry at him even thinking I would or could think anything of him, that I said what I felt like saying at the time, without thinking of how it might affect you. If he has done anything unkind I am so sorry, papa, but I could never have answered him other than I did. And what if he has demanded his money? Can't you pay it to him, papa? Can't you give him the amount at once, so you need never worry about it any more? It will be so good to be out of his hands, papa! One would be willing to do almost anything for that. We would

even do without giving so much to the help of those we wish, to be rid of him. He is such a coward, it is unjust to our soldiers to send the money to them that we would pay him with. They wouldn't want it, I am sure, if they knew, papa."

Her eyes were purple and flashing, her face flushed, while her slim white fingers were clasped fiercely together as she uttered her fierce protest against the man who was too cowardly himself to help fight the battles of their country, and yet could hold such a brave face against the claim of what should never be made good to him.

"How did you know, Nan?" the squire asked, leaning his head back wearily against the cushions of the chair.

It had fallen upon him suddenly, this demand for the money stolen during its presence in his house, although he had been ready for some such claim every day, knowing the man to whom it belonged, though he had hoped in a brave sort of way to himself that even this Howard Blake would see the neighborly side of the question, and let the sum remain to his credit until the war was over. It had proved a vain hope, but the proof of this had made the need of returning it harder than he would have believed. And it came, too, at a time when he was, if anything, less able than usual to meet the demand, for he had sent away as much as he could only the day before, and his ready money was drained pretty low, and he would have to draw the necessary thousands from his bankers. Up to this he had been careful to use only what was free of the bank books, for he would not, when he should be called away, leave less than should bring comforts to those he left behind. He was growing old. He

could not many years longer work for those whom he so tenderly loved, and when he should be called from them he would not leave them less than comfortably provided for. He had thought of this many times lately. He felt his strength giving out, and his once powerful form weakening. There had been so much crowded into the last year or so. What with the war, and this robbery, and the illness of his wife, with the boys under the fire of the enemy—how could a man do less than fret himself into more speedy old age than a quiet life would have given him? And this little girl of his to know that life must hold bitterness as well as sweet for her already, when she had scarcely left girlhood behind her. It was very bitter to his proud nature, but, after all, he could bear anything rather than owe any man a dollar. After all, he would rather the claim of his neighbor be paid while he was still there to work for his loved ones, than to leave it until it could never be so readily paid. What if it did cramp him for some time? He knew better how to meet the straightened means than they could know. He could still hold up his head with all honor; he had done nothing one should be ashamed of. Nan's spirit had entered him, and he was ready and willing to meet the demands of Howard Blake on the morrow without a pang of remorse. Nan saw the change in his face, and knew her triumph. She laughed softly, and dropped again at his feet, the flash gone from her eyes. They were tender now with sympathy.

"It isn't so very much you owe Mr. Blake, papa," she said. "Fifty thousand is a nice little sum, but, after all, it isn't as though it were a hundred thousand. One might as well comfort one's self with that

thought. And how we will feel to be thoroughly rid of that man. I could never bear to think he had the slightest claim upon you—not that I think he has now," she added, with her old spirit of defense returning, fighting her father's rights, "but as long as he claims that he has it is so much nicer to get rid of it. I shall feel as though I could breathe freer now. He always stifled me. I felt so sure of his capability to do whatever should enter his mind to do, especially where money is concerned. What do we care for a few paltry thousands when we have our dear brave boys and dear little mother to fight for us, and we to fight for? We ought to think of our blessings, too, papa, and then we will be better able to bear the losses." She laughed her low, sweet laugh, that rippled over the red lips like the natural utterance of such a heart. Her eyes were deep in their color and brave, looking up into the grave face above, with its marks of care and its marks of age creeping daily deeper. "There are so many falling, papa, while our boys are safe, and now here has mother been given back to us, her dear, sweet self, paler and frailer, to be sure, but still the dear little mother just the same. And when the war is over our boys will come back, and we will be so proud and happy."

She would not even allow the thoughts of that other, who would never come back when the war should be over, to come between her and her father's comforting. She would not let self gain the upper hand of her now. When she should be alone in her own room, with no one to see, she could fight her own battles and her own heart ache. Now she had her father to comfort, and what were her own sorrows, after all, to his? Was she not young, and

strong, and willing to fight? Was she not going in such a little while to take up her work in the battle? Could she not, for the little while that she was with the home folks, put herself aside, and leave only the memory of loving thoughts with them? They would so gladly have given her anything in the world she could have asked for, they were so readily letting her go from them when they did need her—she knew they did need her comfort, though not so much as those sufferers out on the fields were needing the care that would help them back to life, or ease their dying—and should she not put her own thoughts aside for their needs while yet she remained with them in the dear old Hall where her eyes had first seen the light? She lifted her tender face, bright as her sunny spirit could make it, as she added, for his comfort:

"When your little Nan comes back from the war, and the boys are here, and the Hall is as noisy and as topsy-turvy as it used to be, and you sit under the vines on the lawn with mamma, watching our squabbling, you will forget there ever was such a terrible thing as this war, papa dearest. And we will be just your bad, naughty children come back, to be scolded and frowned upon, as you just now frowned when you were thinking of that precious coward of ours."

She laughed and shook her head, with its curls aquiver, and let her own heart-sorrows rest behind the veil of her womanhood and pride, and her own thoughts fade with the thoughts that must come with this grave, brave old face before her, and the thought of how much it had borne during the past years. She patted the rough hand, and still looked merrily into the grave face, determined, ere she

should leave it for the night, to see the smile return that used to be her great delight to waken. It had been so long since she had seen that. He had been so brave and thoughtful of her comfort that she had seen a smile when she knew the heart ache was only uppermost, but the smile she loved had not stirred his lips since the boys went away, and the silence of the great house was wakened only by her light feet and her weak efforts to keep the cheery life going to comfort the troubled hearts.

"I was just thinking, papa," she said, letting her eyes reflect the smile on her lips, "of the time when Charlie and Frank and I played truant, and stole our ponies from the stables that we might go nutting in the woods back here instead of going to the plodding old school, and how you discovered our intentions, and punished us with your stern face, though never a word did you say of blame or reproof. It was always your face that punished me more than any other thing could have done. When you smiled I knew I had done nothing to displease you, but whenever I think of your face as it was that day, I wonder how I could ever have done what must have brought that look upon it."

He patted the curly head under his hand, and there was the flickering of the old look upon his face as he met the earnest blue eyes under the fluffy golden hair fallen low upon the white brow. The old memories came back to him, too, but they were not all so sweet as she would have them in her tender thought for him. There was a touch of the bitter in his smiling as he added to her merry words:

"And how young Travers stood up in his manly way—he was always manly, that boy—and took the blame upon himself, when he knew full well he was

no more to blame than my own boys and my little witch of a girl. He was always so true to his friends, Nan. And he taught our Frank the brave spirit of independence that sent him ready for the fiercest of the fight, with the down scarcely on his lip. And Charlie was with you two in all your scrapes, he was such a limb for fun!"

"Only Helen had such a sweet influence over him always," Nan added, the old thoughts coming up to drown the cry against the memories of the brave boy who would defend her with his own life were it necessary, and who now could never come back to her from the war. "Helen had such a sweet influence over him always, papa, that he could never quite get into such scrapes as the rest of us, for Helen would never do anything she could be ashamed of afterward, if it were only in fun as we used to try to persuade her. She is well fitted to do the work she is doing, papa. I only hope I may do mine one third as well."

"Our Nan and Helen are not the same," the squire said, gently, "for the one is more of the woman than the other, but our Nan has the tender heart and the sweet comforting that makes the world better for its presence, and Helen has the strong spirit and the womanly years that make her what the world needs at this terrible time of trial. But I would never change my tender hearted little Nan for the bravest, strongest woman in the world. She will do her work on the field as well as the other, and her face will be as sweet in the memory of our soldiers as even the pure, gentle face of the other girl."

"You are always so strongly in my favor, papa," Nan laughed, though the silken lashes drooping over

the blue eyes were wet, and the smiling mouth was trembling, "that I am sure I shall never do you discredit by my cowardice, for very shame of so doing, though I am afraid many times I shall be tempted to run when the worst shall come. It is so hard to face the cruel side of life and to see suffering that one cannot help."

And the squire stooped to kiss the smooth brow, brushing back the truant yellow curls with tender hand, as he said tenderly, the glimmer of his old smile on his lips:

"My Nan will ever wear her brave spirit through whatever life shall bring her. I have no fear. Only may the good Lord give her at such times as sweet and tender a comforter as she has been to me."

And Nan's heart was warm with the memory of these words as she bent above the suffering bed of one of her soldier patients many a time, and she could never forget either the words or the voice that uttered them, should she have heavier burdens of suffering to bear than now were on her tender shoulders.

But when Howard Blake again strode down the slope of clover toward the gate in the Hall garden, he found no Nan at the old summer-house, with her lap full of the flowers and the sunshine and bird songs around her, but found instead the brave soul that had carried the girl through many trials even in the heart of her home, had won her to the field where the suffering lay, doing what she could to relieve the world's sorrows, as she must do, being the woman she was, and he comprehended that even such a frail thing as a woman's hand is sometimes able to thwart the plans of a scheming man, and set his threats at defiance. For he had never dreamed of

this ending to his planning for her winning. And he would not even now give up the fight, so intense was his desire for revenge and the winning of the proud, pure woman who could so easily reject his suit after his having gone already too far in his planning to turn back.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### A TENDER NURSE.

What a contrast to the quiet old Hall, set in its shady lawn and fragrant garden, were the scenes among which Helen Travers moved. No tender lights and shadows, with the soft air and fragrant flowers swinging their quiet lives away through the summer hours, but the thunder of the cannon, the shrieking of shells, the trample of horses, and the shouting of men through the days and into the nights; while many a brave soldier breathed his life out under her tender care, blessing the gentle lady, whose face was so tender with its brave hazel eyes and delicate mouth trying to smile into the fading eyes looking up to hers. No flowers were there to lay on the quiet forms after death had set his seal upon them, only the tender closing of the eyes from which all light had fled, and the sending of sad messages, told so bravely with the last faltering breath. Only the sweet, low prayer whispered as the spirit was gathering for its flight, and the wiping of the death dews from brows where the smoke and seams of battle had given place for these, and the touch of cool water to the parching lips. But, after all, she stood her ground, and did her best when the best was all any one could do, and she watched the paling of brave, bronzed faces until she learned in all its strength the ennobling influences of the spirit of true manhood. There were so many battles, and so many wounded after each, that the girl began to wonder how it was that the ranks were kept so full and the struggle borne along with such grand bravery. She knew more of the bitterness of war in the few months she had been in its midst

than she could have learned from a life's telling over and over its history of bitterness and disappointments for many a heart.

So far there had come under Helen's care but one of her old friends, and he had but a short stay, his wound being such that caused less care from the nurse than many others, though it took perhaps as long to heal, and sent him home on a leave that would be better than lying in the sickening hospital, where the sight of others suffering must weaken even the bravest. It was a shock to her at first, catching sight of the face of one of her many friends lying among the pillows of the rude cot, and it had brought to her with sudden nearness the fortunes of war. But when she sent him away with a light heart to his home with messages for her other friends there, though he assured her it would not be long ere he returned to the field, and possibly to her care again, she had smiled her brave smile, and sent him off, a faint, sickening wish to go with him, out of this terrible place, with death her daily companion, and suffering her daily friend. But she put away the thought as she would put away any other thought that was to unfit the heart of a sister of the Union, and went about her duties with a stouter heart and a more willing hand, determined to do to the utmost what she could for the brave men brought to her hands.

But, one day, when the air of the hospital was stifling and the heat of the day brought to an end more than one weakened body, there came in with the one or two others, for whom there was room, one young fellow whom Helen Travers counted among her friends, a young fellow with steady gray eyes and a bronzed, bearded face, whose pallor could not blind her eyes for knowing, and whose close shut lips proved to her, with a sudden swift pang at her heart, how intense was his suffering. Somehow she had feared this would come to her, and had daily watched, gladdened, even in the midst of the suffering of others, when she looked in vain. But to-day she learned how weak she was, after all her apparent bravery, when she was called to help

the surgeon with this brave fellow. He lay on the pillow of his rude cot as though death indeed had touched him, excepting that the steady eyes, opening upon the nurse, grew suddenly intensely bright, and the close set lips parted slowly into a smile that lighted the rugged face with its lines of suffering and its wonderful self-repression. One of the weakened hands reached out toward her as she bent above him, his voice kept steady by strength of will, not strength of body, as he said, gently:

"You are here, Helen? I knew you would be somewhere where there was need of such as you." And then suddenly, as the light had come to his face, it went out, and he lay dead, she thought at first, until the voice of the surgeon roused her to her duties and herself.

"A friend of yours, eh, Miss Travers? One of the bravest fellows of this war. Wouldn't have lost his leg, as he will have to do, if he hadn't stopped to help along some other wounded fellow—some weak little chap, no doubt, for it's like him. He's lost a sight of blood, and will have a tough pull for it, but we'll save him if it's in our power, Nurse Travers—we'll save him if it's in our power. Such fellows as he are needed, and we cannot let him go just yet."

But Helen knew other as brave fellows had gone, and her heart would not be comforted just then. But she must not give up her work for vain mourning, and her hands were as steady and her face as sweet helping in this work of dressing the wound of this friend whom she had hoped not to see there. And not to him wholly either could she give her care, for there were others who needed it as much as he, and she could not let friendship stand in her way.

It was some time before she could return to his side after the wound was dressed, and all done that could be done at that time, but her thoughts were with him wherever she went, though never to the neglect of her duty, for she would not allow herself to be so selfish as that. She would be unworthy of his friendship, she said to herself, should she neglect any of her duty even to care for him. And the sur-

geon had no fault to find with Nurse Travers, even when he called her away, time after time, from the side of her friend, who was very quiet, sleeping as he must sleep to recover, but lying so white and still that her heart at times must fail her for thinking his heart had ceased to beat. But no one knew save the surgeon that a closer friend than any there was under her care, and no one could find any fault with the gentle nurse who bent above them as tender and sweet as she would have bent above the other, and her voice was as soft and steady, with its brave effort to comfort and strengthen the impatient souls under the restraint of suffering, as it could have been at any other time. But as she went among the cots of her section, there was a slight lingering beside that on which lay the sturdy form of her old time friend, and the set face upon the pillows, so white and still, never knew of the tender light in the warm hazel eyes of the woman bending above, her soul going out in the prayer for the recovery of this brave soldier of whom the world was in need, of whom she would not think in sadder thought than of the others, for she could not bring herself to be willing for him to go, he, her friend from childhood, and it may be her tender soul, set so close around him, held back his soul when it must have otherwise gone from his keeping. But it was sorry watching for her. How could she hold so utterly her heart in check as she did, she could never know herself, for it was sorely trying, but she kept her pure faith and her pure soul free from thought of self, and the days passed, many of them with this new soldier of hers raving upon his bed, struggling with his nurses and the surgeons, fighting over, it would seem, the battles he had passed through, but through them all bearing the thought of the old Hall with its home faces and the face of this friend who was watching him with the tenderness she had promised his sister she would give him should there be need. She had not forgotten her promise; she could never forget her promise, nor the sad evening she spent ere she left her home, with the dainty, true-eyed sister of this man, whose soul had been in her eyes as she

held her to her promise of this tender thought should there be need during the terrible time she should spend in the midst of the battle-fields and the wounded that must come to her.

She was thinking of that evening as she stood beside the cot one night, going her last round ere giving place to the night watch, and there was a mist before her eyes that blinded her, and made the face on the pillow waver before her and fade to a strange pallor. Then he stirred, and the low voice, weak even in its delirium, began its monotonous murmuring, and she forgot self in the need of quieting him. He was back in the old garden with Nan and Frank and his friends. Helen was back with him, and her quiet voice and steady eyes must have made themselves felt even in the midst of his wandering, for presently there came a quiet look in the gray eyes, and a gentle softening of the white lips, as the aimless words stopped, and the weak voice murmured her name in the old-time tenderness. She stooped above him, her cool hand on his hot brow, as she uttered soothing words that brought the look of peace to his face. She had forgotten her own feelings and her own trouble. This was Nan's brother, brave Captain Charlie Courtland, brought to her care wounded, and there was a warm thrill at her heart when the low voice uttered her name, and the eyes smiling into his deepened in their color as she bent still lower to catch any word he might wish to give her for those in the quiet old home where he might never again go.

"Helen," he said, softly, the deep voice weak in spite of his brave effort to make it natural, "I knew you would be where—you were—needed. It is sweet to have you here near me. It has seemed to me—all this time—that an angel was—near me, but I—felt it was you!" The parting of the lips in a smile that he tried to make brave, was almost more than the gentle watcher could bear, but she stood her ground with the bravery she would wish the sister and friend of such men to show. "Don't let—them—know," he said, presently, after the eyes, weak in spite of themselves, had closed and opened again

wearily. "I gave—my name—as another, Helen, for—I would not—have them know——"

She nodded, smiling as though her heart were not aching sadly, and said, softly, in her tender voice, made more tender and soft by the knowledge of his suffering:

"They shall not know, Charlie. I promise that. I gave Nan my word that I would care for you or your brother should you come to me, as I would wish my brother to be cared for should there be need. I will do as I said, and you need not fear their knowing until you tell them yourself. You must not talk any more. If I am to care for you you must obey me. I can only command the weak, you know."

It was her old brave spirit uttering its cheer, and Charlie Courtland, suffering intensely, more even than his gentle nurse could realize, smiled his brave smile and closed his eyes obediently, only saying very low, so that only she heard:

"It is sweet to obey such a gentle commander, my Helen!"

Few words, perhaps, but how they cheered her during the weary days and nights that followed, while he lay fighting against the hold death had upon him. Many a time not only the nurse, but the surgeon feared the struggle of the brave spirit against the body's weakness would be in vain. It was a terrible fight. Never in the ranks, at the head of his company, had the young captain struggled as now he was struggling for his life with the help of his nurse and the help of his surgeon. Many a time the flickering light nearly died from the gray eyes, and the face grew set, as though the touch of death was upon him; but he struggled, and rallied, and they still kept up their hearts, though it was an almost hopeless struggle. But Helen would not let her heart fail her. She could save this brother of her friend if it were in human power to do so.

"They're all brave women—every one of them, Nurse Travers," said the surgeon, "but there isn't one of them could bring back the soul to a fainting body as you do. There is something in your eyes

and your brave face that sort of helps them to pick up new courage, and go ahead with the fight for life. I wish you could only cure the sore hearts of those waiting for news of these fellows as you cure their grumbling. But I always feel that if there is any hope for a poor fellow he will win in here. I only wish there were room for more than there is. There are so many whom we cannot crowd in."

And Helen knew it was too true, and renewed her tender efforts to help on those who could be brought under their care, thankful that she could do even her little to end the terrible war.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### A GRATEFUL PATIENT.

It was a hard struggle, and many times both the nurse and the surgeon were ready to give up, but still it did not fail. Whether it was Helen's brave spirit giving strength to the brave spirit before her, or whether the work of the willing hands was not yet done, who could tell? But by and by, after days and nights of watching and care, along with the care of others as sorely wounded as was the young captain, the fits of delirium abated, the fever grew less violent, reason returned, and Charlie Courtland was on the road to recovery, though still very weak and helpless. And when Helen knew beyond a doubt her friend would recover, her heart was glad and ready, it seemed to her, for anything that might come to her.

But it was harder to keep a cheery face and brave heart, after all, while the patient was recovering, and merely lay day in and day out longing to enter the fight again, and help end the war that was draining the country of so many of her sons. He had been listening to an especially vivid account of a recent battle from the lips of one of the men brought in, and he was fuming and fretting as she had not thought the big brave man could fume and fret, muttering desperate threats of stealing off to the fields again if the chance would only offer, with-

out the permission of the nurse or surgeon, until there dawned a smile around the girl's mouth and a merry light in the hazel eyes regarding the angry face upon the pillow. Looking up into the girl's face, the patient involuntarily smiled in return, though there was bitterness as well as sweetness in the smile.

"It's all very well for you to be smiling there, my brave little nurse," he said, "but you do not know the need there is for all the men the country can command at this very time. What do you know about war anyway, Helen? You are doing your best and your bravest, but you know really absolutely nothing of the lack of men, and the terrible struggle there is against heavier forces and the sagacity of men ruling the war on the other side. What do you know of the inner workings of the war and the deadly need there is for every man the country can give to help her out of the sore trial? You're a dear little brave nurse, and do your work as I knew my gentle friend must do, but you are not a man, and have not been in the midst of the fight as I have, and cannot know what I do. You may smile all you will at my longing to go, and tell me it is absolutelyimpossible for me to go with this crippled leg of mine, but I feel sometimes as though I would go, that I must get away, that I could not bear lying here, not knowing what may be the outcome of each day's bitterness. I am desperate, and even you cannot soothe me, though you have the tenderness of an angel for soothing a fellow."

She laughed softly, though there were traces of mist in the depths of her eyes as she laid her gentle hand upon the restless hands pulling impatiently at the covering of the bed. She knew his heart was sore at this enforced idleness, that a brave soul as his was must feel the galling of the chains that kept him down when he longed to be up and doing with all his ardor for the victory of his country.

"Of course I am a woman, Charlie," she said gently, "and, of course, you men, dashing away in the midst of the battle, with the excitement and the danger keeping your spirits up, can never know

what we women, as you call us in rather a scornful——"

"I never thought of scorning you, Helen," he said, reproachfully, the stronger fingers closing over the slender hand of the gentle comforter. "I could never scorn the strength and the bravery and the wonderful souls of women, Helen dear, with you for a friend all my life. It is only that you do not know as we do the terrible need there is for every man at this time when the victory rests on such slender lines, and the ready strength of even one man could so easily turn the scale. I could never think scornfully of you——"

She interrupted him with her sweet, low laugh. The slender fingers once more regained their freedom, and pressed down into quietness the firmer fingers of the restless patient. She shook her head archly, trying to cheer him, as she said gravely:

"It isn't polite to interrupt us so, Captain Courtland. And you need not protest your innocence of scorn, for I know in your hearts many of you men think women are fit only for the quiet of home, and think and know nothing of the struggle going on in the world for their good as well as for yours. But you do us an injustice—indeed, you do. We keep pace with the battles as well as you, though we may have to sit at home with folded arms. And if we are able to enter the field even in this simple manner of nurse——"

"It is not simple," again interrupted the deeper voice. The gray eyes sought the darker eyes with deep reproach. The hands, lying under the gentle stroking of the softer hand, were tense with repressed feeling. "It is not simple, this grand work you are doing to help on the battle, Helen. But you do not know how we feel when we are forced to do nothing but wait. You cannot understand how a man feels tied down with useless hands while others are fighting and struggling in the terrible heart of the battle. You know me, Helen Travers, and you know I could not do other than honor any woman doing her life work as you are doing yours——"

"There!" The kindly dark eyes flashed merrily

into the steady, grieved ones opposite. "See, you cannot even give up trying to flatter us here in the very heart of the field. You soften, or think you soften, any hard thought of us you may possess by a little softened word of our gentle virtues. Oh, you can never know us women, Charlie! You fight in the field, and you win the great victories of the world, and then you come back to us, and say what brave women we are to have nursed a few men back to life who must else have died. You do not and could not credit us with a bravery that sit doing absolutely nothing but wait, without even knowing what may chance to fall upon us from one day to the next, having, it may be, some friend, or brother, or father, whom we may hear, not knowing, has died in the fight, and can never come to us again. You say we are brave if we come out to the field, and do the work we can do, being simply women, but you never know the agony of those sitting at home with nothing to do but wait. Oh, yes. you call us brave little women, and smile upon us, and maybe give us a closer place in your hearts for this little we have done, but those others shut out from our small field of laboring for those daily falling, you never give a thought. Do you not know it takes a braver soul, whether woman or man, to sit down with nothing to do for the struggle than it does for the man or woman to enter the field and fight hand to hand with the threatened evil? You can never understand us, Charlie—you big, brave men. We honor you for the strength that gives us the victory, but we honor more those who are forced to lie by any active help they may not give. If they have done what they could, we would not have them do more. They are more thoroughly heroes to bear with the brave spirit that carried them through the war, the enforced idleness, than though they fought every day and all day long with the ranks on the fields. They were men then, they are heroes now!"

Her face was flushed in this little speech of hers for the defense of her sister women.

Her listener, with her earnest face so near his own, caught himself wondering how he could have

called her weak, or thought her sex less than the noblest of all God's creation, and he caught himself thinking of her as he would not allow himself to think of her now he was a cripple, now he could no longer bring her back the life he would gladly have lain at her feet. He meant—always meant—to win this girl if it were in his power. She had been his ideal since he could remember. They were children together, and her childish spirit had even then strengthened and helped his spirit to be strong for the right. He had meant when he went away to the war, parting from her in the shady garden where all their lives had been spent—he had meant, when he should return from the wars with his soul proved to her, to tell her the desire that must always make life truer to him even should she say him nay. But he could not offer her a life like his, crippled, weakened, unworthy of her love as he had so fondly hoped he might be. Her words were sweet and tender and womanly, but what woman would willingly give herself to a cripple and a worn out soldier? She could talk of her soldiers, and her heroes, but she could never know what she was saying. He pulled his hands roughly from under hers, and turned his face away that she should not guess how he was suffering. He would conquer this mad wish that was tugging at his heart to tell her, and have her sweet sympathy. He would fight this battle by himself, and she could not nurse him with her tenderness as she had through the other fight. She could sit there beside him, but never guess of his heart. He would never give her cause to suffer as he was suffering. She should live her life, and be free from his. He would not turn coward here on the very edge of this strange battle-field. He would live many years, doubtless, and so would she. But his life must be away from her life, and she would never know. He would go home when they would allow it, and he would make his life what he could, but her life would be always just beyond his reach, and she would never know, she would never guess. A sudden desperation possessed him to know how she would feel should she guess of what he was thinking.

A sudden desire—almost a frenzy—took possession of him to face her and prove to her that he knew too well the hardness and the bitterness of the silent struggle where one had to sit down and do nothing while the fight went on, and the victory could never be for him.

He clenched his hands in desperation, and turned his head upon the hard pillow. His face was set, and his eyes not the tender gray eyes Helen Travers had met with hers all her life. He faced her with this struggle stamped upon his face, and the hardness and the struggling suddenly ceased.

The quivering, tender face, the eyes intense with their hidden soul, the sweet red mouth in its brave struggle to hide its own bitterness—all these met his sullen eyes, and forgetting all these brave resolutions, all the honest, manly feelings he had been trying to fill his heart with instead of the love he had longed for—and the two warm little hands were in his, held in almost a fierce grasp, the tender face was drawn suddenly nearer, forgetting all else save what he read in the face before him, and there came a sudden ending to all his bitter battle in swift defeat by the tenderness of a woman.

"My darling!" he breathed, rather than spoke, and Helen was ready to fight her struggle with death and sickness and all the harsh lines of her life in that dreary, sad hospital, filled with all that should fill life with sorrow, save and excepting this winning of the bravest heart she could care to win.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A STARTLING DEVELOPMENT.

"I have such a strange letter here, I shall read it to you, Charlie, in order to make you glad you are to go home so shortly," Helen said, sitting down beside her lover, the smile on her lips, but hiding the trouble in her heart. "It is such a strange—or rather the news it contains is so strange that I want your help in unraveling the mystery. For my part I cannot guess how such a terrible thing

can have happened in our quiet little town, and the instigator of the plot never found out." She smiled into the eyes raised to hers, and gave the letter a slight shake, as though by so doing she could shake from it the desired knowledge. "It is from Hilda, Charlie, and you know what a child she is to send one the nicest possible news? Well, the news she has in this letter inclines me to doubt our former belief in her cheering influences. But, there, you poor, curious fellow, I'll keep you no longer in suspense unless I am called away during the reading of it. Now, prepare yourself for the strangest thing you can imagine, but believe me, dear," a sudden trouble on her face, "it all comes out right. I would not let you know of it did it not."

"All this mystery but rouses my most intense desire to know of what you are talking, Helen," her patient said, drawing her down beside him in her chair. "It is very trying to have to fill one's curiosity with scanty snatches such as you are giving me. I am all attention; please begin reading at once. If you are called away I shall finish it myself."

"Well," and Helen laughed to hide the disappointment she felt, "you will have to read it yourself, Charlie, dear, for the surgeon is beckoning me, and I know when he has that face on I am due for some time. Oh, this terrible war! If it would only end!"

"It will end in time, dear," Charlie said, now turning comforter for the sturdy heart flinching under its daily sorrowful sights. "I know how hard it is, Helen, dearest, but it will end soon."

He was trying to convince himself as well as her, and the girl knew it as she went from him, leaving the letter in his hands, to obey the call for her assistance. The wounded officer brought in for care was almost a hopeless case, but they would do what they could, the kindly surgeon said, as he and the gentle nurse bent over him, lying insensible upon the rude pallet made up quickly at his orders. He was a strong man, Helen knew, and had fought long and well in the struggle, but the shell that had lost him an arm had cut so close to his life that they scarcely

held any hope of reviving him. All thought of her lover or the strange news she had received in her home letter had left her mind as she gave herself up utterly to the work before her. Here was another brave life to save, and in spite of the odds against them, if it lay in her power, she would bring him back to life. Such lives as this were well worth fighting for,and she would do her best. But her best —what could human power do when death had already laid his touch upon a heart?

Charlie Courtland, lying where she left him, followed her with his eyes as she passed down the row of cots like a quiet little queen of a sorrowful kingdom, and there grew into his eyes the look of one too full of thankfulness to be uttered, and it was for some minutes he lay so, forgetting utterly the letter lying in his hands. But his glance presently falling upon it, he took it up, and read with a growing interest and excitement what it contained:

"DEAR NELL:—You are so busy over your poor wounded soldiers that you give us very little news, and only a teeny mite of letters, anyway. But we know, or can guess, of how full your hands are with this terrible war and the dreadful time that it brings, so we don't expect you to write often; only you know we appreciate even the scraps we do get, you dear old sister, and we write accordingly to you as often as we can, not even knowing that you will get our letters, the very mails are so uncertain. I have a great piece of news for you, Helen, and guess as long as you can, you would not come near the truth, it is so strange, and might have turned out so dreadfully, and no one can find out to whom to lay the blame. You know how brave and enthusiastic Squire Courtland has been during this war, and how anxious he is to do what he can to end it. Well, Nell, you could never guess what has happened. It might have been so dreadful, and as it was it threw Mrs. Courtland into one of her terrible attacks of delirium, but she is better now, Nell, so you needn't worry your dear little self over that. Be sure I wouldn't tell you anything about this if all the dan-

ger were not over, for you have enough to worry you without a lot of home troubles. Well, to begin at the beginning, and I always think of that sweet little Nan— Did you know she has gone, too, to the hospital down there, and I suppose knows nothing of this that I am going to tell you? Well, you know now, anyway, Nell, that our little sunny Nan is doing the very work you are at, and that she has longed so much to do, though during her mother's illness she never mentioned it. But as soon as Mrs. Courtland—you don't know how much paler and sweeter and frailer she looks, Nell—as soon as Mrs. Courtland recovered so as to be up in her chair, and growing stronger every day, and gave her free consent with that of the squire—you know he would give his very heart if the war needed it, Nell—our little Nan went away to the hospital, where she heard they needed most the services of nurses, whether experienced or not. She said she could never go on any pretense of being an experienced nurse, and so she went there. It is farther down south than you are, Helen, though I cannot tell you just where; but, no doubt, Nan herself will write and tell you all about it when she gets the time. And now to the story I started to tell you. You know how I go from one subject to another in my letters. Ned always said so, you remember. Dear old Ned! I would give anything to have him here this minute, and you, too, Nell. Well, it seems—but I don't dare even to write it in a letter—the squire was to a certain extent against the dreadful riot there was in the city, and in some way they found this out, and tried to revenge themselves. He found out what they were going to do long before they had struck a blow, and was prepared to defend the city with the rest of those who were aware of the danger, though some laughed the danger to scorn, saying the mob would never dare revenge itself for the drafting of the men. But they did. Some people don't know everything, if they think they do. And so one day they broke into riot. The papers were full of it. It lasted some time, but Squire Courtland was in the midst of the militia, and they had the mob quiet by and by,

though it was a dreadful time. Every man who could helped defend the city, and they did it bravely, though the defense was weakened because some of the force had been called away. Well, it seems that since then these dreadful men found out the squire had considerable to do with their defeat, though who told them no one seems to know, and they made up their minds to revenge themselves on him. Oh, it was dreadful, Nell, and for a time we thought they would surely win. They took the most cowardly way of doing this, too. Of course they would do nothing else. Such cowards take some sneaking way of 'getting even' with any one they think is doing them an injury. And they got up here one night, a whole body of them, and set the dear old Hall on fire, and, oh, Nell, it was a terrible time. At first they thought there could be nothing saved, it did burn so, but finally they got the fire under control, and put it out without injuring much of anything. Every one—excepting the cowards, of course—was so glad, the old Hall seems so a part of the place, and there was no one hurt, only, as I said, the excitement threw Mrs. Courtland into those dreadful fits of delirium such as she had after the burglary. And the old Hall looks natural as ever, excepting the blackened corners where the fire started, and where it leaped up the walls. You cannot imagine what a terrible sight it was, and how every one turned out to help put it out. There is not a soul anywhere around here who doesn't just love the old Hall and its master and mistress. So they did what they could, and they saved the place, and there is only little damage done. But we are all excited, of course, to find out who was the instigator of the deed. Some think it was some of those government fellows—excuse the liberty, Nell, of this dreadful expression, but I don't know what else to say—told about the squire, and in some way this mob heard of it. We're all so glad there was nothing worse. And there you are away off in the midst of the war, and there is Nan, and Ned gone, and nobody home to defend us but we to defend each other. Oh, Nell, will the terrible war never stop and let us have the dear

old times back again—only we can never have the same old friends—all of them—and will you never be here again, Helen Travers, to comfort your poor lonely little mother and sister, HILDA?"

So the letter ended, and Charlie laid it down, his thoughts in a tumult; so much of mystery about it, and no one to explain it to him. It was with more impatience than he had shown in many days that he awaited Helen's approach.

"I thought you were never coming," he said, when at last she came to him, but the sadness of her face checked any impatient words he would have said, and he simply reached out to take her hand and draw her down beside him to comfort her.

"I could not come any sooner, Charlie," she said, trying to keep her voice steady, though the deep sorrow in her eyes betrayed how deeply she was touched. "The poor fellow died not ten minutes ago, and his face was so brave——" She paused to regain her courage, for she would not let her own sorrow trouble in the least this lover of hers, whose own cup was quite full enough. "I believe I will never be truly brave, Charlie," she said presently, letting her trembling hands lie in his for strength, the drooping lids raised to search the kindly eyes opposite for their assurance of trust that she knew would not fail her. "These sad scenes set me away back so, just when I think I am the very bravest creature in the world." She laughed, but it was brokenly, and loosened one of her hands to push the tumbled hair from her forehead. "You have read the letter, I see, dear. It is a sad letter, but it might have been so much worse. It isn't half so bad as that other trouble that fell on them before I left home. You remember about the thieves? It was the most daring piece of burglary I ever heard of."

"Wait," Charlie said. "I haven't the least idea of what you are talking, Helen. What burglary, and how long has my mother been ill?"

She met his questioning look with one of astonishment. Then the color came slowly back to her face,

and left it warm and rosy. She hesitated for a moment, and then said, quietly:

"I thought you knew all about it, Charlie, or I would never have let you read this letter. I thought you knew about everything excepting this last trouble that has come, and that of course I was sure you had not heard. I wouldn't have let you read it for the world!" she added, with sudden vehemence, "not for the world, Charlie! It may have done you a great deal of harm already, and I can never forgive myself if it has. What a silly thing I was to give it to you, anyway."

He stopped the swift words with a kindly nod. He smoothed the gentle hands he held, and smiled gravely to comfort her.

"It has done me not the slightest harm," he said, quietly, "and you need have no such thought, dearest. I think I would have never forgiven you if you hadn't told me of it while I was with you to have your comfort."

It was sweet to have his comfort. It was sweet to know that she could be sure always of this comfort, no matter how hard and sad the world might be to her so many times. It was good to be sure she could tell him of any of her sorrows and feel this tender touch on her hands, and the tender gravity of the gray eyes meeting her own. Her heart was comforted, even coming as she had from the presence of death, and she smiled tearfully, proving her woman's heart still too tender to bear all the sorrow of the war without a trial.

"I shall tell you all about it then," she said, and now she smiled, and the smile was very sweet and tender. "I thought, indeed, that you knew or I would not have let you know, but now I shall tell you all about it, for it would be cruel to let you go home without being prepared for what you must meet, only I did not know our dear little Nan had joined the ranks, Charlie. But I knew she would as soon as ever she could, her heart was so bent on going, and she is so well fitted for it in spite of her apparently care free life. Her sunny face and sweet ways will cheer many a sufferer, as a graver woman

could never do, and she will be as brave as any other woman, and come from the trial sweeter and truer even than she is now. I have perfect faith in my Nan, you see, Charlie."

"And oh, I know of another little woman in whom I have the greatest faith," whispered a merry voice at her ear.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE COILS OF THE SERPENT.

Howard Blake went back through the clover on the slope, crushing them down with careless feet, so occupied with his wrathful thoughts as never to think of the damage he was doing to his clover, too furious at this ending to his plans of revenge upon Nan and her father because of the patriotism that held them aloof from him, and made the girl scorn him with words that burned deep in his heart, though he might laugh at them as he would while in her presence, and that had sent her away to the fields where she was for the time beyond his power, for he did not even know where she had gone. He had been laying his plans and strengthening his hold upon her for so long, feeling so sure of his easy victory now that those who would defend them were gone, and especially the captain, whom, it might be, he feared more than any other, because he was so sure he knew of his design upon the girl whose father he had tried to hold in his power for her undoing. He had worked his plans well, and up to that moment he had been sure of the girl. Now she had escaped him, going, as she had, to the camp where it might be she would thwart his well conceived planning, and prove her strength lay in her weakness after all.

"But I will win!" he muttered, between clenched teeth, as he strode on, his black brows meeting in a heavy frown, the sinister light in the black eyes, a cruel curve to the lips under the drooping mustache. "I will win in the end, and then, my sweet girl, you shall feel to the full extent my power over you and

yours. You scorn me because I will not lay my life open to the bullet and the bayonet. You shall see, my pretty maid, that there are other causes to fight for, and other victories to win. You shall feel that Howard Blake, scorn him as you will, with your proud head raised as though you of the Hall were the only blue bloods in the country—you shall feel that those whom you scorn can lower your proud head, and your father's, to the dust. I shall stand back for nothing now. I might have spared you some of the pain I can inflict, but now I shall stop at nothing that will win you. You shall acknowledge that Howard Blake has the winning power in spite of all the pride of the Courtlands of the Hall."

He ground his teeth, and his eyes were like a snake's in their fury and cunning. He was capable of almost anything to carry out his scheme. His plans were forming even then, disconcerted as he had been at Nan's departure, and he would plant them for the reaping of his gain ere many months should pass. Let the war go on, as he said, he would carry his victory single handed and with no weapons but his fertile brain and his hope of revenge. And he could be cruel to the utmost when he would win, if nothing else would bring the victory. He would prove to this girl that his threats were not the vain utterances of an angry lover. He would bring her to humbly acknowledge his power, and then his vengeance would be complete. Then he would sue for her hand, and not sue in vain. Then she would answer with more grace than she had the other day at his words of wooing. He was capable of almost anything to win her, but he would win.

"I have more than one wire to pull," he muttered, his pale face darkening with triumph. "I have more than one hold upon you and your father, Miss Nan, and if one fails, there are still the others. I have no mercy for you now. I might have had, for you were sweet and dainty as my wife should be, and you can be gracious if you choose. But you chose to scorn me for your dead lover, ha! ha! and you shall now feel my scorn that has no mercy. When I have brought your proud head low,

I may prove to you that the love of a man like myself is capable of carrying out any plan for the winning of his wooing, and you will regret every scornful word you have uttered to me, not only now, but the many bitter words and actions of your past life when we were children together, and you would prove your hatred of me by your wide eyes and curved red lips as you clung to your boy lover. Bah, what a lover he was! You shall feel the power of another sort of lover, Nan Courtland, and acknowledge that I am as proud as you and as well able to win in the fight for a wife as Captain Travers could ever be."

He laughed again, showing the white teeth in that sinister smile of his, the glittering eyes under the black brows flashing with an evil light that little Nan should have feared were it not that her innocence and her ignorance of his planning left her free to go her way with no fear of harm, though she knew that this man was capable of proving himself as thorough a villain as any.

His hope of holding the amount her father owed him over her to bring her to his terms had fallen through. The squire had paid the amount down at his first demand, uttering no word of how much it had cramped him to do so, and he must use the next means he had planned to gain his footing above them. He had worked some of his plans to perfection; what reason was there for his not proving as successful in all he should attempt? If he should prove that there was no such word as fail in his vocabulary, would Nan Courtland still hold him a coward? Would any one dare meet him face to face, and tell him he was not a man that he did not enter the battle lists? Was he not fighting his own battle at home with the certainty of victory? Was Nan Courtland, in her new role of nurse to the suffering soldiers, any more freed from his grasp than Nan Courtland, the dainty daughter of the Hall? Could he not follow her wherever she be, and still make her feel the power of his hatred of her, still make her understand that he was not the coward she had taunted him with being? Nan Courtland, the dainty

nurse of the battle-field, should be more in his power than she ever could be under the care of those who loved her in the quiet old town among her flowers in the old Hall garden. He would prove it and hold it true. He trod many a full blossomed clover under his feet as he walked the southern slope that day, and the men under him felt the power of his wrath as they had felt it many a time before, though never with so constant a pressure. His horse was stung with madness at the sharp lash upon his flanks when his master rode through the town that afternoon. His dog cowed under the blow of his foot as he followed at his heels with canine affection. It was a cruel day for every one and everything in Howard Blake's power, and even Nan, so many miles away, would feel it presently. Not for herself at first it might be, but the blow would fall upon her by and by in worse than a selfish touch. She would know the sorrow upon those she loved, and be unable to help them even by her presence, and she would realize that the serpent had indeed entered her Eden, where the innocence and happiness of childhood were giving place to the sadness and the bitterness and the knowledge of evil that were coming to her with her grace of womanhood. Told as Hilda told it in her letter to her sister, the cruel blow in the dark at the squire through the madness of the rabble from the ranks of the rioters, seeking to destroy the grand old Hall, and the master with it, touching with their coward torch the very heart of the squire's pride at a whisper from the man who would lower every vestige of this pride, and lower the proud spirit of the daughter who had spent her life among the shadows and the sunbeams there, they struck with the cowardice and wild fury of revenge, and they were disappointed; but they were not discouraged with such a hidden leader working for them in the darkness of secrecy. For they had never gained a glimpse of the man who was helping them on in their vengeance, not gained a clew of whom it might be. But they worked in the blind madness that characterizes such brutes, and they might have won that night but for the discovery of

their scheme and the capture of one of their men. But the man who was leading them on to their revenge and his own ends seemed never to be discouraged by any failures. He set them on the track of the squire, as the blow to harm him through other means failed, and they dogged his footsteps through the city and even up in the quietness of the country town, watching and waiting for the chance to come that would give them the blow in the dark. He was never disheartened and never discouraged at the halting victory he was fighting for, and poor little Nan, doing her sweet work of charity among the stricken men in the camps of the wounded, could not know of the evil lurking at her very doors to strike for her heart when the chance should offer. She was a tender nurse. That she knew nothing of nursing and simply followed the orders of those under whom she worked was nothing to her discredit. Her hands were willing and her heart tender, though the red mouth quivered many a time as she bent over the tense form of some of the sufferers brought in from the field. That her heart was sore, and her soul sick within her at so much suffering, no one knew, though the older nurses guessed it from the daily deepening sweetness of the tender face and the paling of the warm coloring of the dimpled cheeks that showed no trace of tears. But she held her heart under her control, and did her work with the willingness, if not all the bravery, of her friend in the hospitals nearer home. And the men loved her as they must love her for her angel face and her dainty patience, the touch of her fingers like the light touch of hope upon their seamed and aching brows, the soft low voice like the echo of the mother voices back in the old days of childhood when this bitterness of battle had not entered its dart in their hearts and their lives. She herself was like the glimpse into heaven to the weary, battle-sore men as she passed between their cots with tender thought for each and all, and the smile that was like sunshine in the darkness of the dreary place. She realized more and more every day what a cruel thing war was as she took up her duties and carried the

lives through their struggle, or gave them tender memories of what a woman's hand can do to soften the trial of death, but her heart—how could they know of the sorrow in her own heart as she smiled her sunniest and her words were the bravest, her hands light upon theirs to soften the pain of their sufferings? How could they know that for her all hope to come with the end of the war was at an end? Only life's sunshine was for such as her, they said among themselves, and there was only the wish that sunshine should be forever over her life in their hearts as they said it. That theirs were darkened with pain was but cause for her tenderness over them, and they could bear their pain more bravely with the frank eyes upon them and the touch of the light fingers over theirs. Her nursing might not go far toward bringing them back to health, but her presence was like the brightening of a dark sky, and gave them hope of sunny weather when the darkness should be past. The surgeons were her friends, the nurses loved her. There was that of womanly tenderness under the proud grace of her manner that dislikes or distrusts could not enter where she was. There was not a man among them, bearing their sufferings bravely as they did, but would have gladly laid down his life for the bringing of more happiness into her own. There was not a woman there but would have been willing to lose much of her own gladness—should there ever come gladness again in her life—to have brought more brightness into that of the tender woman, so like a child in her tiny form and her frank face, with its short sunny curls over the small proud head, and the slender hands, so pure and white, bearing no mark of the roughness of life.

"I can't help looking at you, Miss Courtland," one of her patients said to her one day, stopping her as she was passing his cot, reaching out his one strong hand, the other—ah, well, he had given the other to his country, and would have given more had it been necessary—"you look so much like a young fellow that fought in our ranks one day down yonder," a nod of his head toward the bitter fields toward the

south, where more than one fierce battle had been fought. "He had your eyes, with the smile always in 'em, and your hair, though it wasn't so soft and so long; and there was the same sunniness about him somehow as there is about you. I hope you won't mind my speaking about it, but I have been puzzling my brains, lying here, trying to discover whom you did remind me of, and it came to me just now like a streak of light that it was that young fellow, though I don't know, and never did know his name."

Nan paused willingly now, her fair face flushing with delight, her eyes full of the smiling the man had so described, the lips trembling with the sudden hope that now she had met some one who could tell her of Frank—for that it was Frank whom the soldier meant, she had not a doubt—and she had never heard from this dearest of her brothers, this best beloved because so sunny-hearted, always so ready to enter into her spirit of madcap pleasure, when graver Charlie would have stopped to think. Her heart had been so sore because of the silence of this brother that now the faint ray of hope that she should hear something of him, even if but a crumb of comfort, made her heart quicken its beating and her face alight with hope. This soldier of hers had been through the thickest of the fight, and must know if her Frank, her bonny, blue-eyed brother, were still to come to her when this dreadful war should be over. From Charlie she had heard, but from Frank not a word since the day she bade Helen adieu in the shadowy old Hall with the silence of death brooding over it.

"Tell me about him, Corporal Brown," she said, and her voice was low and winning, the light upon her face proving the light in her heart. "I think you must mean my brother. We have the same hair and eyes, they say, and he was the dearest, sunniest tempered fellow in the world, and I'm just sure no one else could be quite like him." She sat down beside the man, brushing as she did so the dark hair that clung to the damp forehead where the heat and the suffering were doing their best to weaken a

strong man's body and heart. "I'm just sure you mean my brother, and, of course, it will be good for me to hear of him from some one who has been with him in the fight. I haven't heard from him in, oh, such a long, weary time, that it will seem grand news even to gather the little you may know. I am so proud of my brothers, Corporal Brown, as well as my brothers who are mine only by their brave fight for my country."

How softly she could utter these tender words that made so much easier the pain the men were bearing. Let one set their faces and steel their hearts against the sin of flattery as they will, there is still the touch of an angel's voice in the lips that utter tender words of cheer and comfort as Nan was doing. It was sincere flattery, and it came from her heart. Who could withstand such? Not the strong man lying before her, made weak through the struggle he had made for her and her country, called as she had just said, her brother for his bravery. The strong face, seamed and scarred by the hard struggle with hunger and suffering, lighted and deepened with a glow of the first pride he had shown since he entered the camp, as he said, gently as she could have said it:

"Your words make the suffering light, nurse. You would do to be a general, for not a man could refuse to charge the toughest battery with every odds against him, with you at his head and your words in his heart. I'll tell you, indeed, all that I know of this young fellow, though it isn't much. For your sake as well as my own I wish it were more. But we were together not for many hours, anyway, and then the toughest battle was on the eve of of breaking upon us, and those things make a fellow sort of hungry for cheerful words, and the laughter that can lighten the heaviest heart, no matter how tough a battle may be upon one on the morrow. We were at Fortress Monroe, and the Confederate gunboat was not far from us up the river, and the general had given us our words of cheer in camp that morning, when a boat load of those poor fugitives, that seem to have no fear even of the blood-

hounds in their hurry to get away from the South and up to the North, came down the river almost into our camp. We were on the look out for 'most anything at that time, and, of course, we were careful how we took even such poor beggars in, but we were ordered out to capture them—for, of course, we could not let them pass—and it proved to be the strangest set of fugitives I ever came across. There were several women among them, dressed in the garments of men, and if ever you saw a more beaten out set of people I'd like to know it. It seems there was a girl among them who was the sweetheart of one of the men, and she was running away with him up to 'Linkum,' as they all were, so sure of his help, and she had brought with her some other women, and the general found out about them, and that night what did he do but give 'em as jolly a wedding as the proudest pair could desire, there on the very eve of that terrible battle. And this young fellow of whom I spoke, he just entered heart and soul into the thing, and got up a spread for the bridal party, and we gave them music, and had dancing and a regular wedding time, as though there were not the hardest fight of the war—almost—to come on the morrow. But that's what we all liked in this fellow. He never seemed to worry about what might come on the morrow, he just went in, and gave us all as jolly a time and as free from care a night as any wedding couple could have asked for at the time. And at the end of it, what did he do but up and pass the hat around among us, and there were the officers and their ladies there, and a regular swell time it was, indeed, and he did it as though it were a matter of course that we should help in any way we could this newly married pair who were to start on their tour on the morrow—that's how he put it—and as though many of those there did not know they were likely to start on an altogether different journey themselves on the morrow. But it was his way, and that's why we all liked him. Even the general himself gave toward the donation, and if ever a couple had a turn out that couple of runaway slaves had. They were the only ones allowed to go,

for they were free, and held in slavery only by some sort of treachery—as hundreds of them were—and the others we had to keep. But this fellow was the image of you, with his sunny eyes and smile, and the curls all over his head, and the general even couldn't help giving in to him when he wanted the dancing for the good luck of the wedding party. He gave in to him as he'd give in to you if you were to ask him something pretty hard, I am sure, Nurse Courtland. You don't believe it, but try him and see."

Nan laughed happily, though there was a mist before those same sunny eyes, as she would have answered the soldier's last words had not one of the women come up to her at that moment, a paper, discolored and ragged from much travel and wear, in her hand, a kindly interest on her face.

"I wonder if you know this man, nurse," she said, gently, the kindness in her eyes touching the girl's heart. "I happened across the account, and wished you to see it. The paper was sent here to this camp a few days ago, but we have had no time for reading the news here," a tender smile on her face. "It is seldom we get hold of papers, anyway, and this must have been sent here by some friend knowing of your presence among us, for it has a blue mark around the heading."

In her heart she thought it anything but a friend who would send such a notice, if it were for Nan, to the girl at such a time, but she herself had nothing to do with it, and would simply learn if her belief in its being for the girl were groundless.

Nan took the paper with slowly dawning interest, her thoughts so filled with the account she had just heard of her brother—she was so sure it was her brother—that she scarcely realized what the woman had said to her. She glanced aimlessly down the columns in search of the blue mark around the heading of the article, and then suddenly her sweet face blanched as though the touch of death were upon her, and the life and light went out of her face as she stood as one turned to stone before her kindly companion. The woman's heart was deeply touched.

She would never have spoken to the girl of this had she known it would affect her, for the girl was so brave for others she was sure it must be a severe blow that would so affect her for herself.

"I am so sorry," she began, laying her hand kindly on Nan's arm. "I am so sorry, Nurse Courtland, that I——"

Nan looked at her and smiled her stony, set smile, as though she must smile, though her heart were breaking. She met the other's kindly gaze with her steady blue eyes, as though to prove her heart unhurt, though there was a strained look about them that hurt those watching her sorely.

"It is nothing—much," she said, gravely, trying to keep her voice steady. "It is nothing—much. Only my father—has been taken by the Southern Government, and held—as a spy!"

Then her face changed, and the pallor gave place to a purplish hue as she caught her breath as though she were strangling.

"I know who has done it," she cried, her sweet voice strained with sudden agony. "I know who has done it. There is only one man in the whole world would have betrayed my father."

And then, swaying suddenly, she would have fallen had not the woman caught her in her arms.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE STRANGENESS OF FATE.

There was sorrow through the wards when the news of the gentle nurse's trouble was known, and many a manly heart throbbed with the desire to help her if it were possible, feeling its utter inability to do aught but prove their sympathy by bearing with braver hearts their own suffering, and giving her smiles instead of the grumbling she had listened to many a time when the waiting for the leave to go home or the leave to return to the field was so long. There were kindly words for her on every side, and smiling lips meeting her quiet face, grown so grave and sad in spite of its brave en-

deavor to put self aside among these brave soldiers suffering their pain in mute willingness to add nothing to her heaviness of heart. There was many a hand reached out to touch hers in silent sympathy as she passed down between the cots, the light somehow gone from the sunny face that had carried so many minutes of brightness to the hearts there. And this sympathy was very sweet to the girl, though there was little she said in regard to her inner thoughts, for she did not go there, she said once, when questioned as to how she could so bravely bear the blow upon her—she did not go there to wear her own sorrows on her sleeve, but to help lessen the sufferings of others. And why should she be telling of her sorrow when all knew of it, and to talk of it could do no good? But what she suffered no one knew. Her heart was so tender for the home friends and the life that had been so sadly broken in upon by this terrible war. How she longed for the quiet old Hall and the fragrant garden with its flowers, many and many a time, no one knew. How her heart went out in its wild longing to be with those who needed her care and all her tenderness now. How she cried out against the fate that shut down so strangely upon her, keeping her here—for she would not leave—among the sufferers from the cruelty of war, when her own father was suffering from the same cause, under such far different circumstances—and her mother—what of her? That there were friends there she knew, but it was not like the home faces after all, and to know absolutely nothing of those who were out in the field and camp would bear her heart down until it must nearly break from the strain. How could she stand it to remain there in the hospital among those who were suffering, it was true, but who were not her very own, after all? How could she remain there, giving them the care and the tenderness she should give those nearer and dearer? How could she do nothing when there surely was something she could do? But she knew nothing of what she ought to do. How could she help her father in his sore need? How could she

save him from what would come to him, though she knew not what that might be? What was it they did to spies?—though she scorned to think of that term in regard to her father. He was no spy; he was simply using his eyes and ears for the good of their cause, and what man with a heart for the right, but would do the same? These enemies of theirs used such strange means to gain their ends! Her father was no spy, and he was as noble as any of those who sought to wrong him. If it were that cowardly Howard Blake who was doing this thing—as she began to firmly believe in her first thought of him—then he were in truth putting his threat to the proof and setting his vengeance up so high for her sorrowing that she could have no hope to outwit him. But she would not despair. If there were nothing she could do she could at least give her life and her care for these soldiers fighting in the same cause with her father, though they were in the field, and he was shut off in the home ranks. If there were only something she could do for him, something she could do to free him from the wrong laid upon him, from the bonds he was laid under. If there were anything she could do for him surely she could find it, surely there would never be such a cruel fate as to leave her in ignorance of it until too late. But what could she do, and what was it she would defend her father from? Her brain was of no use lately. She smiled dully, thinking this, and ran her fingers slowly through the curls of her head. What was it they did to spies when taken by the enemy? Was it the chains and the imprisonment that would wear out, after awhile, even the brave spirit of her father? Or was there something else they did? She wished she could remember what it was they did to spies. She would ask some of these men who were so good to her, but she could not bring herself to speak to even them about it just yet. And yet if she would do anything she must do it at once. Would not the surgeon do his best for her, and give her the experience that had come to him through these terrible months suffering and seeing the suffering of others? Was he not one of the kindest of men, and

would he not do for her as he would for himself were he placed in such a dreadful position as she was? He would be kind to her, anyway, though any of those she might go to would be the same. He would give her, maybe, the comfort she so needed, and coming from him, she would be sure there was comfort for her.

But she had no time just then. There was so much of this terrible work to be done that she must put her own thoughts away and hide her heart for the caring for these others who were giving their lives for the cause her father was in. She must smile and say her kindly words as though her heart were not breaking with the trouble and the worry and lack of knowledge of what might come to her during that terrible time. She must give of her kindest thoughts when she had no comfort for herself.

But by and by, when there came a chance, when the sufferings were cared for, and the time was coming for the gentle nurse to give up her place for the night, Nan stood beside the surgeon, doing her last little offices of kindness and smiling her cheeriest, trying so hard to put down her heart and her selfish sorrow, waiting for the opportunity for her to ask of him what she could not ask even of those who were her kindest friends, and would have given their lives—any one of them—for her happiness. There were always so many little last things to do, she thought, as she went with him from one cot to the other, her dainty form and yellow curls drawing a smile from many a pain-drawn mouth, as kindly eyes followed her down the long rows of cots and kindly hearts ached for the sadness of the lips so clearly made for smiling. It seemed to her that they would never be through this round of duty, that they would never come to the end of this, so that she might know the end of what she feared. It was so hard to wait, it was so much harder to wait than to bear even the hardest knowledge of certainty. She could not bear it, she said, to herself over and over, as she smiled and uttered her soft little words of comfort—she could not bear it much longer. She could not go about her duties another

day and not know what might fall upon her at any time. He was kindly, this man at her side, and he would tell her as no one else could just what she should do for the help of her father. She was sure she could trust him. She could not be misled by the kindly mouth and the searching eyes when she had seen day after day his kindness and thoughtfulness of those coming under his care. He was a father himself, she knew, for he had told her considerable of himself as they worked or sat together, the man so tall and strong and broad shouldered, the little lady so small and dimpled and sweet. He could not but be kind to her when he should know what was done to her father, and he would devise some manner for her to release him if there should be such a hope. She was beginning to think there was no hope for her any more, there had so much of sadness come into her life with the passing months. The summer had brought her nothing but pain, and here was the winter coming on, and she was so sorry, for there would be more horrible suffering than she would dare to think of.

But there must come an end to all things, even the hardest to bear, and so there came an end to Nan's waiting, and she stood out in the open air with the cool winds lifting the soft curls from her pale face as she lifted her frank eyes to the face of her friend, and asked her faltering question that she could scarcely gain courage to ask, the answer might be so terrible. But it was out at last, and she was waiting for the answer.

"You poor child," the surgeon said, and the eyes, that had been so steady even when he knew he was using that terrible knife for the good of the sufferer, were not so steady now, for he could not meet unflinchingly the wistful, wide eyes, the hue of the bluest October sky there had ever been, and the lips were trying to be so brave to answer should there be need for their answering. "You poor, tired out, hurt little girl. If you were my daughter, in spite of the brightness of having you here to comfort my soldiers, I would pack you off this minute to the home care and the home love that you are starving

for. I know you are brave and unselfish and willing to give your very life for these brave boys, but you must not do this, Miss Nan, because it truly is not necessary, and I could not bear to think that I had given these little white fingers work that they should never touch, nor the tender heart a needless load of sorrow when there is enough sadness in the world for us to wish to keep such a sunny child as you free from care."

"But I came of my own free will," said the grave, low voice, "and I will not be sent back, doctor. Only I want you to help me, and if you cannot, or will not, I must go to some one else. Even if there is need of the knife, I shall not flinch, so you need not hesitate to tell me."

She laughed to keep up the cheerfulness of her words, but there was a faintness about the sound that smote the kindly heart of the man beside her.

He laid his hand gently on her shoulder—she came scarcely up to his shoulder—as he said, gravely, no hesitation in his quiet voice, for he had tested the bravery of this frail girl, and knew she would bear even the knife, as she had said:

"There is trouble enough in the world, little girl, for me to wish to keep you free from its touch, but if you have come to me for help and not comfort, I shall tell you the truth, as I am sure you wish me to do, if I do have to use the knife to cut away the hurt." He laughed, too, but there was no more mirth in his attempt than in hers, only a tender ring of sadness and a touch of the purest pity for this sweet woman standing out so bravely against the battle of her life. "You ask me what they do with spies. I must tell you that they set a strict watch upon such men, and when they have one in their power there is honestly little hope for him. They shoot them, little girl, as they should be shot themselves, for making it necessary for me to tell you this. Why do you want to know?"

She had not told him the worst of her story. She had come to him for an answer, and she feared if he knew the reason for her asking he would not tell her quite all that she must know to be prepared for

what must come and what she must do. But there was scarcely need for him to ask when he saw the pallor touch swiftly all the life from her face and the eyes deepen with the terror of the knowledge. She had said she must know if it should be as kindly cruel as the knife in their work among the soldiers, and now that she found that it was the knife that had been used, she wondered if the men, lying under it when they were brought in to be helped, suffered the pain that she was sufferingl She uttered no word; she simply laid her hand unsteadily for a moment upon the arm of this strong friend, and searched his face, bent tenderly above her, for any hope of a lighter sentence than this that she had brought upon herself when she said she must know.

"You poor little woman!" said the kindly voice of this friend. "You poor, brave little woman, Miss Nan. If there is anything that I can do for you, you must tell me at once. I know of nothing I would not do for you to ease for one moment the pain you are under. Tell me what it is, and who knows but I can do something to help you?"

He patted softly with his large, gentle hand the tiny hand resting for strength upon his arm, and steadied her weak steps as she faltered for a moment where she stood in the intensity of her suffering, and looked to him for the comfort he could not give her.

"And is there nothing I can do?" she asked presently, fighting so hard for the mastery of this new trouble that was laid upon her. "Isn't there something I can do for him, something any one would do or could do, no matter how hard it might be? It is for my father I ask, Surgeon McAllister. They cannot call him a coward, but they try to prove him such. There isn't a cowardly drop of blood in one of the Courtlands, women or men, and my father is no spy, and he shall not die for it. There must be something that I can do, and I will do it—you must help me do it."

He still stroked, as tenderly as she had so many times stroked the hands of others, the soft white

hand upon his arm, his kindly face troubled by the pain in the one lifted to his.

"There is no dishonor in being a spy, Miss Nan," he said presently. "There is no dishonor in being that. It is only a traitorous spy that one need fear. All armies must have spies in their midst, and it is as necessary a position as that of any other. You must not feel that your father is dishonored because he was taken for that, my girl. If he is no traitor—and there is, indeed, no need to ask such a thing—there is no reason why you should feel as you do about that, only we must think of some way to get him from their hands, and so save his life for more of the brave work, I am sure he is doing, knowing you as I do. We will walk down here along the walls, Miss Nan, and you can recover your strength while we plan for some way to give your father his freedom. You must not bear more of this excitement than is necessary, or we will have my brave nurse upon our hands as a patient, and no matter how pleasant that might be, we must prevent it if we can, as we will prevent the carrying out of the designs of our enemies. Come with me, and we can talk as we walk. The air will do you good, and the getting away from that close building will give you new heart. There is so much suffering there that one cannot think quite calmly of those who are outside of it."

For nearly half an hour they walked slowly up and down along the walls within call, if there were need of their aid, and Nan felt her heart already lighter, as this friend had said it would be, after the soft air of the October evening had blown upon her sad little face with its crown of tumbled curls.

There were many plans brought up, discussed, and put aside as unavailing. The surgeon, knowing it likely that the girl's father would have met his fate almost at once upon his capture, if that fate were to be his, did not offer any plan that would in any way endanger the life of the girl who would go to the rescue of her father as readily as she would cross the shadowy stretch of grass under the old, battle-scarred trees where they were walking. And the

minutes passed, and still there seemed no ending to the dread that filled the mind of the daughter whose heart was with her father as she trod the grass beside the hospital walls, with the sturdy friend who would have given the best years of his life to have brought her the comfort she sought. But presently through the shadows came the form of one of the orderlies from the camp not far distant, and seeing the two grave figures, he addressed them, lifting his cap with easy grace, and eying with frank admiration the little lady at the surgeon's side.

"The general sent me over here to bring the message of one of the spies we captured to-day. He is a strange fellow, and held for more than this simple fault." He smiled, seeing the startled look in the wide blue eyes upon his face. "He is held for some pretty bad charges, and, against our usual orders, is to be shot at daybreak to-morrow——"

Nan started, and grew even paler than she had been, while the hand under that of the surgeon trembled violently. Her friend stopped the voluble young officer's rapid words with a gesture, as he demanded sternly the nature of his errand and the message he was to deliver.

"This man was so persistent in his demand to be granted one last wish that the general gave in, and he sent me here to discover if there is such a nurse under your care as Miss Courtland."

Nan clasped her two hands around the arm of her friend as she leaned forward, saying, in a voice she did not recognize as her own, it was so strained and almost harsh in its very sweetness:

"I am Miss Courtland. What have you to say to me?"

"You——" the young man stopped confused. "But, I fear I am mistaken. The prisoner who sent the message is such a villain you can have nothing to do with him. He could have nothing to say to you."

"Deliver your message at once," said the surgeon, sternly, and the man obeyed.

"This man—he will not even now give us his true name, though we have a name well fitted to him—wished this box given to Miss Courtland at once,

and I was to wait for any answer she should have for him. That is all."

He bowed, and held toward the girl a small box set with tiny pearls, and studded with her name in rubies. She took it in her hand like a thing of ice, standing erect before the two men in all the dignity of her womanhood and her brave old blood that had descended to her through a line of noble Courtlands from the years of the ancient wars. The pallor on her face had given place to a flush as warm and flaming as the light in the west when the sun sets. There was not a quiver of a muscle as she touched the spring, and the lid lifted, revealing within, upon the blue satin lining, a faded spray of Canterbury bells.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE FORTUNES OF WAR.

How many thoughts flashed through her mind as she listened to this man speaking of the spy who was to be shot on the morrow, and here it ended in nothing but the jewel-case that had been taken from her room that night long ago that set her mother so near death's door, and laid such trouble upon them. Her face was set icily, and there was not a trace of the tremor that had struck the kindly heart upon the news of her father's danger. If this thief of theirs was to be shot on the morrow—and how else could her jewel-case come into his possession?—what was it to her? It would be a fit ending to a life of such lawlessness. She wished no man harm, but had she not said she would find her daring robber some day, and though she had not thought that he would come to her through the strange fortunes of war, yet she was certain from the first that she would some day hold him in her power, and mete to him the mercy he had shown to her and those dearer to her than her own life. And here he had been so strangely sent almost to her feet to be shot on the morrow at dawning. Was it a Nemesis that brought these marvelous things about in the wheeling world?

Or was it the turning of the great wheel of fortune that crushed so many in order to bear aloft the few? Or was it a just God that ruled the lives and the changes of the brave old world, and brought the straight from the crooked, and made all things proved? She smiled stonily as she thought of this, and faced the two standing before her waiting for the solving of this strange message to the gentle nurse in one of the war hospitals. At last she spoke, and her voice was as cold and set as her face. She even smiled again in that strange fashion, and met with her steady blue eyes the waiting ones opposite.

"I need not go into details regarding this," she said, quietly. "It could not interest you. But this be certain of, the man you are to shoot down to-morrow morning as a spy and worse is to have the justice meted to him that I have longed for. He robbed my home not only of its money value, but he laid my mother on a bed of illness from which she has not even yet recovered, and set more trouble upon my father and the whole house than I could tell you should I attempt it. The sentence is just, and I would not lift my finger to save him were it in my power."

Her voice was perfectly distinct and sweet, but with that strange iciness in it that was new to the man beside her. Her lifted face was as coldly proud as the sternest of the old Courtlands could have boasted. She had drawn herself to her full height, and looked, in the fading light of the clear October evening, under the shadow of the trees, like a veritable avenging angel, turning her pure face from the contact of such a totally depraved human soul as the one she was judging.

"I agree with you there," said the young officer, quietly, his face grave as the face of the lady before him. Her commanding presence, in spite of her tiny stature, allowed no other than the gravest respect. "But you have not yet read the note that accompanies the box, madam."

"I did not see it," she said, quietly, lifting the torn bit of dirty paper from inside the lid of the box, no curiosity to learn its contents visible on her cold

face. "Pardon me for detaining you so long, sir. I will read it at once, though there can be no answer to any note from him."

The scorn in her voice gave her listeners a hint of the anger she was capable of showing should there be cause, and proved her not the weak, tender woman the surgeon had called her in his pity.

She unfolded the paper with careful fingers, and turned so that the light from the west should touch its rather indistinct characters, written, as it evidently had been, upon the knee of the writer. She read it through once, twice, thrice, the watchers marveling greatly at the changes upon her face. The stony coldness gave place to deeper scorn, softened instantly by a dawning hope and flushing with the gladness of some news that must cheer the sore heart of its reader. Surgeon McAllister touched her arm lightly, his face reflecting the gladness of her own.

"You have news," he said, "worth having, Miss Nan? I am so glad for you. There isn't a man in the hospital yonder who would not give his life for you, as you know, and if it is good news, may we not know of it?"

She lifted her eager face to his, the eyes afire with hope, and the red mouth quivering with its gladness.

"You know of what we were talking just now, surgeon? Here has come my answer without knowing! This man who is to be shot to-morrow at dawn holds it in his power to save my father if I will save him. That is the only alternative. Here is his note, you can read it for yourself. He will save my father if I will save him. You are to tell me now how I can save him."

She laughed in the sudden revulsion of feeling from the depth of despair to the glimmer of hope. She held up the torn note with eager hands for her friend to read. She seemed unable to daunt with her new heart and her new hope.

In the terms of set courtesy they had used toward each other that strange night when he entered her room like a shadow of evil, the note ran thus:

"DEAR LADY:—I have not forgotten you, nor the brave spirit you proved that night at our chance meeting. I have watched you ever since, not so that you knew I was watching, but you have been nowhere that I can not tell you of. I knew you were here among the wounded soldiers, and I am not surprised, for a spirit such as yours would of necessity follow such an heroic course. But to return to my message. This jewel-case of yours will prove to you that I am not cheating you with the semblance of untruth. The flowers have been with me through the war, and will be with me when I die, unless you save my life, as I shall tell you presently. Your jewels—well, of what interest is it to you where are your jewels? Your father is to a certain extent in my power. You never dreamed of this! No, of course not. If I send one little word to the commander where he is it would not only save his life, but would set him at liberty immediately. I will prove it to you if you will give me a chance. Go to the general here—he is a kindly man, I can say, even though I am in his power—and ask of him my life and freedom. You will not? Then your father dies at dawning to-morrow, when I die! I have full proof of this. Try me, and save him if you will.

"Believe me, sweetest lady, yours in life or death——"

There was no signature, but Nan cared not at all for that. The man held her father in his power, and would save him if she would save his life. She had said she would see him die at her feet, and lift no hand of hers for his rescue. True, but she did not know of what she spoke. What would she not do for her father? If it were in her power—ah, she had not stopped to think of that. She had said she would save him, that she would put off not for one instant longer than necessary going to the general and pleading for her father's sake, for the life of this villain. But if he should refuse? If he should tell her, as she had just told her friend, that he would not, if he could, lift one finger to save him? Suppose it were the judgment for her own harsh unforgiving?

Suppose she went in vain, and the morrow's dawning ended her father's life, as it would end the worthless life that held him in its power. At dawning—that was not long. Only a few hours at the most, and the death or the liberty of her father would be assured. Then it would be too late for regrets at failing courage, for regrets for lack of power. If she would do her work she must hesitate not an instant. She must go to the man who could free her father's saviour, and thus free her father. She would win through her bravery, not her tears, and surely she could not fail to win. She held out her hands to the man beside her. as she said, steadily, though her heart was throbbing madly:

"I will come back to you as soon as I can, Surgeon McAllister, but I do not know how long it will take to soften the heart of my lion. I shall do my best with him. Wish me success, won't you?"

She was very brave and sweet, with her wistful eyes upon his face, and he could not daunt her brave spirit with any foreboding of ill, though in his heart he did not believe she could win. When once the command of one of these stern generals was uttered it was like reclaiming the dead to break them. But he could not darken the hope of this brave woman, standing in the failing light with her outstretched hands and her earnest face uplifted to his, waiting for his words of good will.

"If there is any one in the wide world can gain his life, Miss Nan, you are the one to do it! It wouldn't take me long to say yes to you if you were to plead with me. I wish you'd try it."

He laughed and held her hands warmly in his for a moment, and then let her go, knowing that surely she would fail utterly, but unable to dim the eagerness of the brave heart.

But how could he know that she would not win? With her tender face and her womanly soul, was it impossible to win nearly any battle she should fight? Had she not the courage, and the patience, and the hope that brings victory at the last?

She went with this orderly as bravely as though she were one of the soldiers of the army, trusting him

as she would trust any of her brothers, and was allowed to enter the presence of the general, after a few words from the orderly and a glance at the eager, wistful face, under its crown of yellow curls, that was so like that of a child. How could they say her nay? And once inside the tent of the man who could save her father if he would, if he would set at liberty one of the greatest villains of the war, Nan forgot herself utterly, forgot the look she saw upon her friend's face of utter doubt in her success, forgot all things that could take from her errand its success, and, advancing with the free grace of a child to the table where the general sat, she spoke to him in her grave voice that proved it were no child, but a woman with a heart brave in spite of its sadness, and involuntarily he smiled. She was such a grave little woman standing before him with her two white hands clasped, and her tender face flushed and paling under its yellow, tumbled curls, with the wistful wide blue eyes upon his in a pleading he could not find it in his heart to utterly withstand, and the sweet, low voice uttering unhesitatingly its errand. But when she had finished, and was waiting, the light of her soul making her face very tender and strong and sweet, the smile was gone from his face, and he was as grave as she could be waiting for his decision.

"My child," he said, kindly, no one could be other than kind to this brave, proud child-woman, "you do not know or you do not realize what you are asking me to do. The man for whom you plead is the greatest, or one of the greatest, scoundrels on the face of the earth. How could I, even to save your father's life, give him his liberty? It would simply be setting loose to do more and greater harm a man who has already done more toward defeating us than you would believe should I tell you. I would help you if I could, believe me. But I cannot."

She was for a moment speechless in her disappointment and ill success, but her proud old spirit came to bear her through, and her tender heart would not give up so readily to the stern refusal of

this man. He was human, he would surely yield. Not that she would wish him to stain in any way his honor, but if he could do this thing for her without blemish to himself would she not win? But he would not yield. He was as sternly unyielding as he was gravely tender, and though it hurt him sorely to disappoint this sweet, brave-hearted woman, he must still keep to his commands and put it out of the power of this man to do more harm than he had done to their cause--ay, though it should demand the lives of a hundred such men as this girl's father, for the right should conquer, and he would not let his weak heart tempt him to yield—not even to her pleading.

But how could she give up hope? How could she go back to her work with the knowledge that she had failed in this pleading for her father's life? Was there nothing she could do? She met bravely the stern face opposite her, the eyes under their gray brows, looking out kindly at this brave little daughter pleading with such tenderness for her father.

"If you will not grant this wish of mine, if you still must refuse—and I would not, even for my father, have you stain your soul with dishonor—if you cannot grant my pleading its success, will you grant me the liberty of pleading with the man himself, and see if there is nothing I can do with him? I must save my father, sir; I must save my father if I can. He is such a brave, grand man, sir, you would help him to live if you knew. He has done nothing to shame either himself or us—there isn't one of the Courtlands would do it—and I will save him if I——"

"Courtland," he said, gravely, interrupting her in her swift words. "Courtland? Is your father a Courtland, child?"

"Yes," Nan said, gravely and sweetly, her brave heart still keeping up its courage. "Squire Courtland of the old Hall in the town beyond the city of——"

"Squire Courtland? The man who has proved of such aid to us in this trying time? Are you sure, child?"

She laughed as a child would have laughed, as though she did not know who her own father was. Her questioner smiled also involuntarily. She was so like a child.

"There is only one thing I can do," he said presently, lifting his head from his hand, where he had rested it, thinking over this strange story, yet no more strange than many of that terrible time of war. "There is only one thing I can do for you, and if you fail in your pleading with this man, I will do that if I can. But you may go at once. I would not let one moment's delay endanger the life of Squire Courtland. Tell the villain in there that if he will save your father's life he shall not meet his death to-morrow, though I will not set him free. He shall live, but he must live as a prisoner of war, and take its chances and its changes. Now you may go. Let me know the success of your effort."

He smiled upon the small, sunny-haired child as she left his presence, believing no more than did her friend in the success of her pleading with the man she had to deal with, but neither would he place one shadow of hindrance in the brave path she was treading for her father, whose spirit she had inherited to such good purpose.

But Nan had no fear, and went proudly into the presence of the thief and the man who was doing his best and worst to win the victory for his side. She was sure she would have known him anywhere, but when he arose to greet her, drawn to his full height, his fine figure somewhat weakened by the hardships and the dangers through which he had passed since that night when they met in the airy room of the wide old Hall, and though the eyes were flashing with the same spirit that had carried him through more than she, pure, true woman, could ever have dreamed, and there was the grace of his bearing, and that swift movement of the hands which she had remembered for his undoing should the chance ever come to her, she realized that she would almost certainly have failed to identify him had she been set to do so in a room full of criminals.

He arose to meet her with the deep courtesy of the

man who had braved her in her room, and set at defiance all the laws of daring burglary. She stood before him icily, no bending of the slight form, though there was a wistful light in the steady eyes lifted to his that set his cool attempt at their old form of raillery at defiance, and left him for the moment discomposed. But he recovered himself instantly. He had not dared the laws of his country, and all the laws of humanity, and the laws of God as well, to stand like a foolish boy in the presence of this mite of a woman, be she brave and proud as she might.

"My friend is late in coming," he said, smiling, the glittering black eyes upon the pure, cold face that had lost much of its rose hue since last he saw it. "But I knew that you would come. I knew that you must obey me in this as you obeyed me in that other order of mine. I thank you for your promptness in replying, and would ask, if I may, sweet friend, in how far you have met with success?"

"What mercy could you expect?" she asked, quietly, her red lips curving in their old scorn. "Did you expect me to plead for such as you? Did you think I would sully my womanhood by asking for the life of a murderer, for the life of a thief and a villain in every sense of the word? Did you think I left my brave soldiers suffering from cruelty of such men as you—did you think I would have left them to come here and plead for you? No," there was the ringing scorn that he well remembered, and the daring spirit that had braved his power in her voice and manner as she spoke. She held her proud little head as well up as any duchess of the land. Her hands were dropped carelessly at her side. She was once more in his presence, but now he was at her mercy, all her pity was gone, and he should be paid in his own coin.

"You have lost none of your high spirit, I see," he said, gallantly bending before her, as though to do homage to her bravery.

There was a new light in the black eyes so intensely scanning her face.

"Why should I lose one atom of my spirit?" she

questioned, haughtily. "Do you think that such men as you, who prove yourselves such cowards as to fight in the dark when our brave soldiers never fear the light—do you think that such as you could daunt the spirit of one of our brave women? We scorn you as we would scorn so many serpents at our feet, but we would not hurl you lower, for we could not. There is no depth you have not reached. I could not wish you truer retribution than that which has fallen upon you. I said I would not lift my finger to save your life were it in my power, and I would not, though I would not hurl you lower were you not already sentenced to go. I can save your life if I will. You need not thank me," the fine scorn in her face silencing the words upon his lips as he started eagerly forward. I wish no thanks, and you must first hear what I have to say. My father, you say, is in your power. You mistake there. You have it, it may be, in your power to sentence him to death, but you could no more claim power over him than you could claim a hold of an angel above you. He is so far beyond your reach that I would let him die, ay, and he would wish me to do it rather than set such a man as you at liberty to do the harm again that you have already done. My father will die, you say, at the same hour that you die. I can spare your life if I will, I have the word of the man who, by one gesture, could stop the deed at the instant ere it were done, but I will not do it!"

She was magnificent in her scorn. He felt an intense sense of admiration for her spirit in spite of the fact that her words meant his death knell. There was a flash and a light in her eyes that forbade her saving the life of her grand old father by also saving the life of this man. There was a humility about it that she could not bear. She would not lift one finger to stop the righteous sentence that had been passed upon him. She could save him, but she would not. All the suffering of those brave men who had come under her care arose before her, and she could herself have struck this man dead. She would utter no word to spare his life—

the life that had caused the death of so many brave men. The life that were better ended, the life that could come to no good after its course of utter villainy.

"I came in here to plead for my father," she said. "I can save your life but not your freedom. But when I came and realized what I should do I would not take my father's life from your hands as a gift were there no need of my uttering a word in your defense. I would scorn the gift, and so would he!"

She turned and laid her hand upon the flapping curtain of the tent as though she would leave him, but he started forward, and she paused, gracious even at the last.

"Your scorn becomes you," he said, but there was a harshness in his voice that she had never before heard. The glittering black eyes were bloodshot, as though there had come to him, daring as he had proved himself, a moment of cowardly terror at what lay before him. Then he laughed, and the laugh was harsh and bitter as he threw a bit of paper at her feet. "I thank you, sweet friend, for the life you would so graciously grant me, and in return I give you, without hope of reward, the word that will not only save your father's life, but set him at liberty as free as he was ere ever the war broke out. This only have I to tell you, but one word of warning that you will understand, against the man you know as well as I, whom I need not name. He has proved his power. He has worked for your undoing from the first. How, think you, did we know so well the plan of your home? Who set the traps for your father, and would not be daunted, and worked always in secrecy with the might of his wealth? You know as well as I, and I but warn you. You show me no more mercy than he has shown you, yet I will not go out of the world without this warning. And now I have but one favor to ask of you. It is to you perhaps a small thing; to me it is much. Will you grant me the return of the spray of flowers I sent you as guerdon of my faith? They have been with me through all

since that night in your home, and I wish not to part with them on the threshold of a new life."

Again he laughed, and the girl unconsciously shivered. She had borne much, but she was beginning to falter with this strain upon her. The full knowledge of what a treacherous, desperate man will do to accomplish his ends was being proved beyond a doubt. She had scorned him, but he was proving his power in spite of her pride. And this man, his acknowledged tool, had pleaded with her for mercy—had dared plead with her for mercy.

"I acknowledge the great sacrifice you are offering when you grant the power to release my father without the granting of your life," she said, steadily, "but I could not accept it, sir. My father would not accept it, given by the hand that gives its blow in the dark. I wish to be merciful. I might even have been more kind to you, knowing that, as you say, you are on the threshold of a new life, but I have seen so many brave lives go out without a quiver of fear that I hold if you will even you need have no fear of death. I put away all unkind thoughts, and offer my deepest sympathy and hope that you may prove your soul fit for death, and that a Higher Judge may be more merciful to you than you have been to others. Farewell, sir. We will never meet again. I grant this wish of yours, and would gladly grant the wiping out of all your life together with that of your accomplice, were it in my power."

She inclined her head with slow graciousness, reaching out to him the jewel-box, so granting his last request, and turning, lifted the tent curtain, and was gone, leaving him to the darkness of his thoughts, scorning the bit of paper that the lifting of the curtain had drifted to his feet. And so his life went out.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### A DAUGHTER OF THE UNION.

Nan left the tent as bravely as she had entered it, and was again admitted into the presence of the

general. The orderly had followed her in this visit to the condemned man, and lifted the curtain of the general's tent for her to enter. He was another of those brave young fellows who were never specially noticed during that terrible war, but was as brave and self-denying as those others who made their names dear to all hearts by their bravery and truth. This small, graceful lady, with the air of a princess and the sweetness of an angel, was like a bit of the peace they were fighting for, and that must come ere many more months should pass. Waiting, as he had been ordered to wait, just out of earshot, yet within calling distance should there be need of his assistance, he caught now and then words that gave him the insight into the errand of this brave girl, for her voice was clear, and the night wind drifted these words to him, and they followed him through life: "I came in here to plead for my father—but when I realized what I should do I would not take my father's life from your hands as a gift—I would scorn the gift, and so would he!" He never forgot the words nor the clear voice uttering them, and through his life they influenced him to higher action. Is there no power in a woman's hands?

She walked proudly, as a daughter of the Union should, into the presence of the general of the army. There was a light in her eyes that was dazzling, and a curve of the sweet lips that betrayed the grand old spirit of her father, and the soul that must scorn, even to reclaim a life, the acceptance of a gift from a villain and a traitor. She walked up to the table where the general still sat and said, as he glanced up to learn her errand:

"Pardon my troubling you again, sir, but I must let you know that I would not have you, for me, stay for one instant the carrying out of your command in regard to this man. I should have known that I could not accept from the hands of a traitor the true life of my father. I thank you for your kindness, sir. I will find some way to save him, or, if not, he would far rather die than be given back to us at the hands of such a man."

"Stay," the general said, as she was turning with

her proud inclination of the graceful head. "You did perfectly right in that. I was pretty sure a Courtland could not take such a gift. The squire, as you say, would not wish it. You have his spirit. There is much I would do for him and you. We will do what we can to save your father. I shall send——"

The orderly entered with a word of excuse for the interruption.

"Pardon me, general. Surgeon McAllister sent this note to Miss Courtland by messenger, with orders to give it to her at once."

There was a frown on the general's brow as the young orderly, bowing, handed the missive to Nan, and withdrew silently as he had come. Such intrusion was against his orders, unless there were peremptory demand. But the face of this proud woman before him, glancing at it, softened instantly any anger he felt toward the young man on his staff. The haughty pallor had fled, and in its place was the flushing of new life and the gladness that made the sweet face like a charm to heal the hurt of those wounded fellows in her care. A smile was dawning around the lips that had been so drawn with self repression but a moment before. She shook back the tumbled curls from her forehead with her old childish manner, and there was the faint ripple of laughter across her lips that proved how sweet the sound might be. The man before her, one of the bravest generals of the time, was used to nearly every phase of hardship and pathos, but even he, who had more than once signed a death warrant without a quiver of an eyelash, felt a sudden moisture on his cheek at the sound of this girl's sweet laughter, faint though it was, and the thought came of how bitter the war really was to so change a sunny nature. She came quickly up to him. What if he were one of the greatest generals of the day? What if he were able to frown down her gladness? The paper in her hand held out so eagerly toward him gave the touch that must soften even the harshest word.

"Read it," she said, sweetly, the blue eyes alight with happiness. "You will be glad as I to know it.

My father is safe, and a friend of mine is waiting to see me at the hospital. I thank you for all you have done, sir—for all you would have done, but I cannot help being so glad there is no need of any planning to save my father. How could they harm him, if they would, the dear. big, brave father, who would scorn any harm they attempted against him."

The man before her smiled, and the grave face was gentle and kindly with this touch of tenderness upon it. How like a child she was in spite of her womanliness. Did she think even such a grand old spirit as her father's could hinder for an instant the execution of any plans laid by the enemy? Did she think they would not have more gladly taken his life, and so ended the help he was giving them to win the victory? She was a child in spite of her grace and her pride. The yellow curls were aflutter, and the flushed face that of the veriest child in the world. But the eyes—ah, they were, after all, the eyes of a woman with the dauntless soul and the daring that would win, struggling against wrong and oppression. He held out his hand to her, the hand that held so much power, and he arose in the height of his manhood to bid her farewell and God speed.

"There is little I can say to help such a brave woman," he said, gravely, and the smile was still stirring the iron-gray mustache. "It is such women as you that do more toward the bringing of peace than all the fighting we men can enter. You strengthen our hearts, and you keep warm the thought of the homes for which we are to win, and we win. Good-by, child. You are worthy such a father. The man you could have saved shall know your power and the womanhood that knew the utter uselessness of granting more time to a soul that would but use it for harm to others. If I come through the battles that are before us I shall hope to meet you some day—you and the father of whom you are justly so proud."

He crossed the space to the door, and lifted the flapping curtain for her to pass through, with the courtly grace that he would not have shown even a

queen, and bowed graciously as she lifted her tender face to him in her farewell, the smile haunting him in many quiet moments afterward.

"With men such as yourself at the head there can be no doubt of victory," she said, softly, the smile in her eyes as well as on the red lips as she passed out of his presence.

"You ought to be proud of your general," she said, sweetly, to the orderly, who walked respectfully beside her to the old church that was now their hospital. "If there were more grand men like him there would be less war in the world. Goodnight. You have been kind to me, and I wish for you the happy ending to any trouble you may have, that you have brought to mine."

She held out her hand as frankly as she would have done to one of her brothers, and there was a smile on the lifted, tender face under the faint light from the church door where she was bidding him farewell. And many a time during the long weary months of the war the girl's face returned to him as it looked that night, and took on the expression of an angel smiling her kindly wishes for his life. While Nan, entering the open door, found the surgeon waiting for her with another form beside him which at first she did not see. The darkness outside was still in her eyes, and the lights within were dazzling as she stood at the entrance, her brave face lifted to her friend as she uttered, swiftly, her gladness at his message.

"The general would have done what he could," she said, "and the cowardly traitor himself offered me my father's life without reward, but I could not accept it at such hands as his. And now," she added, and the surgeon's eyes grew misty at the girl's happiness so clearly reflected in the face, "bring me to my friend, please, Surgeon McAllister, and tell me more about my father. It is so good to know."

"Nan," the voice in her ears sent the color from her face and set a dazed look in the wide eyes raised to the face bent above her.

Was it the darkness that had blinded her and maybe touched her hearing? Was she dreaming,

or had the terrible days turned her brain with their horrors? Was this—she caught her breath, and stretched out her two hands as though to prove if this were dream or reality—was this in truth the friend who had come to her—the friend who must have come to her at her need from the world of the dead? Was this—the darkness reeled and the lights went whirling about her. But she kept her senses with a stern determination to not lose hold of this one ray of hope. Was this in truth the friend whom she had come to meet, the friend whom the surgeon had said was waiting for her? She steadied her nerves with a mighty effort and lifted her white face to the bronzed face above her, steadied she believed by the strong hands holding her own, by the tenderness of the face, and eyes, and lips so near her.

"Ned?" she said, faintly, and there was a strange line of pain around the trembling mouth as the wonder deepened in the wide eyes searching the face above her.

The surgeon had disappeared, and they were alone at the doors of the ruined church, where the mantle of charity had spread itself over the sufferers of the world

"Ned? Have you truly come to me knowing how I need you, or is it only a dream that must end so bitterly—so bitterly?"

He stooped to her in swift tenderness, the drawn face and troubled eyes too much for him to withstand. He drew her to him, and steadied there, and always through their lives the small, brave woman with his arms.

"Nan—darling," he said, his voice driving out all doubt from the mind of the girl, with the searching eyes and the quivering, lifted face. "Nan! What is it, dearest, that you would say? Did you not know I would come to you as soon as I should hear of this trouble to your father? Could you not have trusted me to save him were it in human power? Did you think I could let the father of my dear little sweetheart die if it were in my power to fight for him and do what I could to save him for her? Have you, after all, so little faith in me, Nan, darling?" He

kissed the quivering red lips and smiled into the face that had been brave through so much suffering. "My poor little sweetheart!"

She steadied her voice and heart as she laid her hands on his arms, smiling a dawning smile of new life and hope, being so sure now that it were in truth no dream, but the sweetest reality that could come to her. The warm color was once more in the smooth cheek as he touched so tenderly the tumbled yellow curls on the sunny head, the brown eyes upon hers.

"But I thought you were dead, Ned," she said, and there was still a tremble in the low, sweet voice. "They said you were dead, and I have been——"

He stopped any words she would have uttered. A wonder came upon his own face. No wonder the sweet face had grown so pale at his presence. No wonder the sweet eyes could not comprehend.

"Poor little sweetheart!" he said again, and the low voice was very tender. "I never knew you had such a thought, Nan. I learned from the squire that there had been such a rumor in the papers, but I thought you knew long ago that it was untrue. I was not even wounded in that scrimmage, Nannie, and if I had known——"

But what did she care so long as it was not true —so long as this tried friend of her life was with her again?

"Tell me about papa, Ned," she said, softly. "It is so good to have you here again. I feel brave already."

"As though you were not always," he said, tenderly. "Did I not tell you that morning after the terrible night you proved your brave spirit—did I not tell you it would take a short change to make you a general, Nan? You have proved——"

She interrupted him swiftly, a shudder of fear and horror upon her.

"Did you know he—that burglar—is to be shot tomorrow at dawn in the camp down there, Ned? I came from him when you sent for me. It is so dreadful, Ned—so dreadful!"

"It is what he deserves, Nan," he said, sternly, silencing further words of hers. "He is the worst

enemy you have. You cannot know the depth of his villainy—the depth of his crime. What will you say when I tell you that he and Blake were simply working for each other? That it was at Blake's instigation he robbed your father the better to gain a hold upon you. To be shot is too good for this villain. Your surgeon told me about it. I could shoot him myself, and every rifle should be loaded for his death when they bring him out to-morrow."

"Don't, Ned," she said. "Don't, Ned! I know he deserves to die, but to die as he must, with such a cowardly life behind him, is so terrible I cannot bear to think of it. I might have saved his life, Ned—I might have saved his life to-night, and so saved father, as I thought, but I could not do it. And he told me—yes—about Howard Blake. I guessed he was capable of treachery, but it is dreadful to know it beyond doubt. Was I very hard and cruel to this man, Ned? I am almost sorry now——"

He smiled into the anxious, quivering face.

"You would have been no daughter of your father, no daughter of the Union, Nan," he said, steadily, "if you had done such a thing. He deserves death, and to be shot is too good for him. A hundred more years of granted life would have been used simply in acts of harm. You shall think of this no longer, and I will tell you instead about the brave man who is justly your father."

"Yes, Ned," she said, obediently.

It was strange how she had changed in the few short minutes since their meeting.

She was still the brave, noble woman who would have given her father to death rather than have accepted his life at the hands of a coward, but there was a sense of being able to lean upon the strength of another now that made her the tender girl of the old Hall days. She had and would always obey commands of Ned when uttered in this kindly voice, and her heart was too thankful at having him again given back to her to rise for even an instant in rebellion at any command of his.

"Yes, Ned," she said again. "Poor, dear papa! might have known you would save him. But how

did they ever get him, Ned? How did they ever suspect him of doing good to the army against them? How did they ever dare to come for him to the dear old Hall and take him away from there as though he were a criminal? I don't see how one of the men on the place could have let them do it."

"But they did not do it, Nan."

He was arguing within himself whether he should tell the girl the whole of the story or not. She had proved her bravery, but he would not add one iota to the struggle she had endured, and must still endure, if she remained through the terrible months that were coming, when the struggle would be fiercer and the horrors greater than they had been even yet.

"They did not go to the old Hall, Nan. There is not a man there in your father's employ but would have died for him rather than have let that happen. But they took him in the city, they captured him by strategy where open action must have failed. They were guided and posted by one of the greatest villains the world could have borne. This man you left to his fate to-night is as nothing compared to the villainy of that other man who betrayed your father into the hands of the enemy, and has done all that was in his power to injure him in the past few months. He would have committed any act of villainy to win you—to win my brave, noble girl, too high above him for even his thought to rest upon. Howard Blake? Yes, Nan, none other than he, and could there have been some power to have stopped him in the beginning there would have been more peace and more happiness in your old home to-day than there is. He would revenge himself upon you for your slights of him, for so he said when he was dying, Nan, for he is dead. Thrown from his horse and hurt to death, but living long enough to tell the villainy of his life. He would win you, Nan, and would so bring down the pride that had always been his hate—he, the unlawful son of a man as cowardly as himself—and he bent his life to the winning, thinking no villainy too cowardly or too cruel to the end he wished to gain. He has been guilty of more

than you could realize, should I tell you, Nan—more than I would tell you here away from the shelter of your home. But he has failed—failed utterly, and my brave girl and her noble father are freed from his hold and his planning at last. For your father is safe, Nan—never mind how we saved him."

How could he tell her of the capture of the men who were under escort on their way to the government post, where he must have been out of all power to save unless by miracle—of the capture after the fierce fight that had lasted but for a few short minutes, and ended in the victory of their men and the return of her father to his liberty? Her heart was sick enough with the struggle and the trials and the sadness of this war, and he would tell her nothing of what should prove to her the utter recklessness of the men who would end the war if treachery or bravery would do it.

"Your father is safe, Nan, and once more in the old home. You need have no fears of further harm being done him, for Charlie is there—your Charlie, who proved so grandly his brave spirit in the field, but who, giving, as so many have, one of his limbs to the victory of his country, is now at home, where he was sent, with the honor due him for his brave defense of his country's honor. You may be proud of your brothers, Nan. They have the old Courtland spirit," added her lover, with pride in his own heart for the noble girl at his side. "I came to you at once, Nan, but I must leave you again. There are the needs of war, and I could not hesitate even for you, my brave girl. But you are to keep up heart, and all will come well in the end, and the war will end with our victory, be the struggle no matter how hard."

And Nan smiled steadily and bravely into the gentle face bent above her, and knew that there must be struggling even harder than there had yet been ere the victory should come, but why should she send away the lover just given back to her with other than words of the bravest and the strongest?

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE END AND THE BEGINNING.

The war was at an end. The struggle was over. There were the dead, and the homes left desolate, and the hearts sick with longing for those who could never return, but brave with the knowledge that their dear ones fought well and bravely for the end. There were the numberless graves in the churchyards, and the countless graves without headstone or the sanctity of the church's shadow above them on the fields, but peace had come once more to our beloved land, and hearts should not fail at the lives laid down for its winning.

And what a contrast to the battle-fields, with their dead and their thunder, was the quiet old Hall in the midst of its lawn and the fragrant garden toward the south, where the carnations and the blue bells of Canterbury breathed their lives out under the sunny skies. No battle there, and no hint of thunder and blood of the fields, where brave men gave their lives and noble women gave their hearts' best gifts for the ending of the struggle.

Five years had passed since the night that Nan Courtland, in the pride of her womanhood and the knowledge that her brothers were fighting on the battle-fields, faced the daring chief of the burglars, who would have robbed them of their peace and their gold, spurred on by the man who hated her, had it not been for her brave spirit. Five years, and again the old Hall resounded with laughter and the noise of men's voices and the ringing whistle that had made the old place echo with life since the boys romped through the rooms and the shadowy halls. There was commotion, too, more than the everyday life would cause through the house and the lawn and garden. There was the burst of happy song on the lips of the daughter of the house, and

the girl who had been her friend all her life. There was the merry call from garret to cellar, as though life would not grant in one day the happiness that was crowding to the lips of its inmates.

"It's too good for anything." Nan whispered, as she caught her friend around the waist, meeting in the upper hall, where the western sun flooded through the high windows in a magnificent burst of glory. "It's just too good to be true, Helen Travers, that my very best brother is to have you, and my other very dearest brother is to come to us to-night with the girl who proved her gentle heart, while he was so ill there at the South. It's just too good to believe, and I never shall believe it until it is proved beyond a doubt."

Helen laughed also, though there was a hidden touch of tenderness in the soft sound that told of deeper feeling beneath the merry surface.

"It is good to think of, Nan," she said, and there was that in the hazel eyes that made the other reach up a-tip-toe to kiss her. "I am proud of my brave soldier lover, and of my little Nan's brothers. But there is another brother who happens to be mine that somebody else should be proud of, too, saucy child!"

"Oh!" the warm color flamed across the dimpled cheeks, and the wide eyes grew dewy for an instant. "Of course, Helen Travers! But I am only talking about your happiness now. Mine came to me ever so long ago, and the war will always have a kindly thought from me, remembering what it brought me."

"Yes, and the brother of yours who is coming home to-night brought back to you, as it were, from the dead," added Helen, gravely.

That had been a terrible time when there had come no news of this bonny, blue-eyed brother; when it seemed that there could come no news to heal the sore hearts waiting and longing for what they were certain could never come to them. When it seemed that the terrible war had ended, but also ended for them the merry voice and the sunny heart that had been one with this sunny haired

daughter in making the old Hall echo with laughter and noises. And then there had come this news, brought so strangely, by the fugitive girl for whom he had planned such a merry wedding in the midst of the battle, who, now the war was over, had returned to the South to learn of her mother's fate, and recognized—what strange chances there are in life—the hero of her wedding night in the young officer, raving in delirium brought on by exposure and a wound that must have proved fatal but for the tender care of the Southern girl of the household where this fugitive girl's mother was, held faithful by the kindness shown her, even when she might have gone with the other recklessly happy negroes to their freedom, leaving those for whom they had worked, many of whom had been more kind to them than they could ever expect of those to whom they were going—there she had recognized this bonny-haired young officer, and when his health was coming back, and he could talk to her, she had come after weary and troublesome journeying, not being used to such, to the Hall, with her glad news that must cheer the aching hearts waiting for what they feared must come as the end of this silence and waiting.

Frank had been in Libby prison, and when at last the prisoners were liberated, he had started home, and fallen ill with this fever that would waste away the life of the strongest without aid, and one of his brother sufferers, a Southern gentleman in the uniform of the North, had taken him with him to his home and the care of his mother and sisters. And there he had been brought back to life as he could never have been, but for this timely aid and this kindly heart born under the southern sky.

And this woman, whose heart was full of gratitude for the kindness shown her during the strange day and night of her wedding, would do for the sunny-faced young officer what she could to repay in a little the memory of what he had done for her. And she came like a messenger of hope to the Hall, and was welcomed as she must be welcomed bearing such glad news.

And now, to-night, Frank was coming back to the peace and the quiet of home, and with him would come the girl who had nursed him with such tender care, who had shown him the sweetness and the nobleness of women standing on the other side of the fight ready if the chance came to prove the willingness of the heart to do and to suffer if need be. And the old Hall was alive with the gladness that had entered it with the coming of this news, and the waiting hearts were eager preparing for the welcome to the returned brave brother and the unknown but surely loved girl who had brought him back to life and the dear home.

"And what is the use of waiting?" Ned had whispered in the ear of the sunny-haired sister waiting the return of her brother from the chances and the changes of war. "What is the use of waiting, Nan? Why can't we get married, too, when Frank comes home with his bride——"

But Nan would not listen, and laughed her sauciest as she retorted her answer, flashing her great blue eyes, so alight with happiness, upon this eager lover of hers.

"No, Ned Travers. There shall be nothing but the home coming of our dear old Frank with his bride that night. I could never think of you, even at such a time, as I must think of the man I am marrying."

And he had kissed the willful lips, acknowledging that the lady of his choice had won—surely—the right to do as she would about the wedding day, when she had given her heart to such tender work as he knew had filled her days in the strange hospital of the church under its dreary shadows, scarred with the smoke and cannon of the battle, where many a life went out with her tender face bent above, and many a life was saved with her patience and her tenderness.

And the squire, with his added years and the marks of care upon his grand old face, could have asked for no more happiness as he sat with his gentle, white-haired wife—given back to him from the very edge of the grave, as he said—among the

eager group—Nan and Charlie, and Helen and Ned, with their mother and sister—waiting for the sound of wheels that would herald the approach of the so long-missed boy from the old Hall. And Nan, her hand in her lover's, whispered now and then a word that told of the sad watching of hers on those steps, so long ago the memory even was softened of the man whose harsh hand would have crushed out all the sweetness of life for the sake of his revenge, who would have cheated her as to the death of her lover in the hope of taking his place—who would have struck out with death the life of her father in order to gain a firmer hold upon her—but whom, now touched by the hand of death himself, she could think of with kindness and a trace of sadness for the bitterness that had marred a life God meant should be noble.

And then the scented silence of the evening was broken by the rumble of wheels, and the sparrows in the tall elms each side the gateway arose in a flock, in their excitement, crying—and the girl laughed to remember—the cheery, "cheer, cheer, cheer," she had listened to with such a different heart in the days when the world held so much of sadness she could gain cheer even from the calling of the birds.

And the carriage turned in at the gateway, and the group were on the steps, and the old Hall, even to the garden, was ringing with the glad voices that had brought sorrow but not death to its inmates. While out in the garden the carnations and the Canterbury bells were swinging softly in the gathering darkness, lulled to sleep with the sound of laughter and soft voices and happy hearts breaking in song now and then through the rooms where sadness had rested so long, the lifting of the vail had left the hearts light with new hope and new life and the promise of the peace that would come upon the land.

And even in the midst of this gladness the girl, through whose hands the glad news had come to the aching hearts there, was not forgotten, and in her home farther toward the east were tokens of their

remembrance and the warm hearts that could not prove by gifts, though they tried, how deeply she had their good wishes and their sympathy.

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The only book of the kind ever published. This is an interesting and unique work of considerable labor and expense, and something many society people will be interested in, as it gives a complete record to date of all American ladies who have married titled foreigners, illustrated with their armorial bearings. Young ladies traveling abroad should not fail to secure a copy as it will be of great assistance in regulating their heart strings.—*Elmira Telegram.*

If anything were needed to crystallize the craze of some American women for titled husbands it has been provided in this veritable hand-book for marriageable maidens and ambitious widows. It will doubtless be hidden away in some secret corner of the boudoir, or carried off in the traveling trunk across the ocean, to be consulted, cherished and studied; while the names of more than two hundred American women who have successfully hunted down the titled game will arouse the envy and hasten the palpitation of many a husband-hunting aspirant to wedded privileges.—*N. Y. Saturday Review, March* 8.

# *Good morning!*

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